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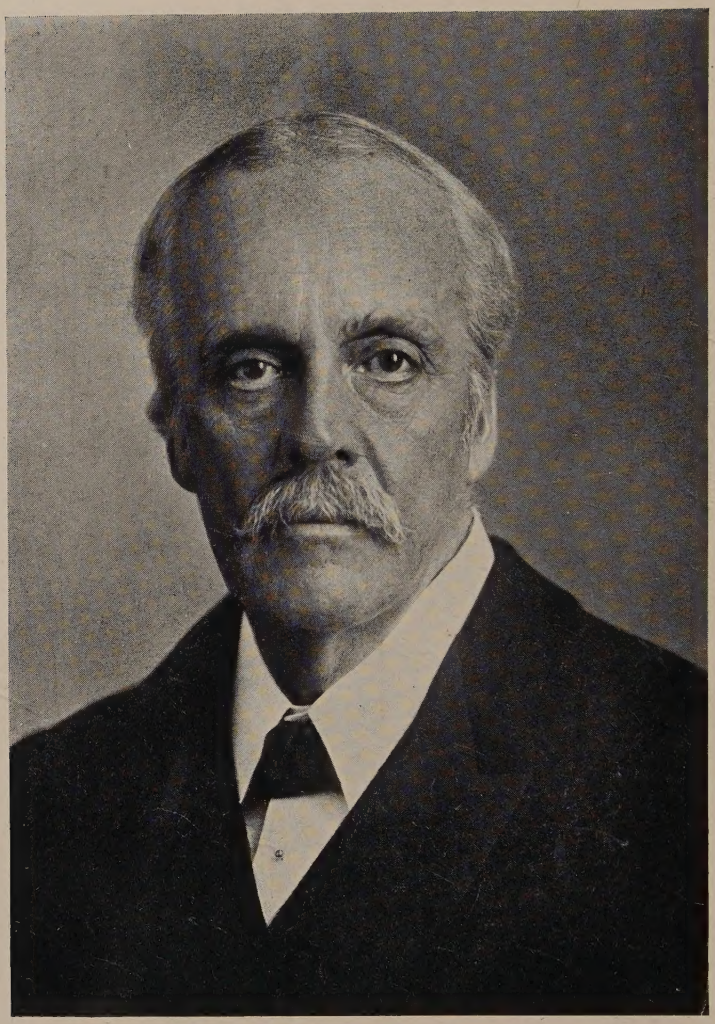

Arthur James Balfour.

THOMPSON, Edward Raymond
111

MR. BALFOUR

A BIOGRAPHY

by

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First Impression, November 1920
Second „ November 1920

PREFACE

THE author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to Mr Alderson's *Life* for certain light on the youth and early manhood of Mr Balfour. Regarding the Tariff Reform period, he has derived great assistance from Mr Holland's *Life of the Duke of Devonshire*, letters from and to whom are occasionally quoted in the text. On the same subject he has found Mr Peel's animated sketch *The Tariff Reformers* both stimulating and informative. For the last chapter, in which an attempt is made to appraise Mr Balfour's main contributions to philosophy, the author has to thank Mr A. Wyatt Tilby.

CHAPTER I

Most distinct as an individual, Mr Arthur James Balfour belongs to an easily recognisable type, represented both in England and France by a number of statesmen who owe their fame less to any specific performance than to the impression created by their intellectual brilliance.

In State affairs the qualities above all necessary are perception, energy, and judgment. The statesman must see things as they are as well as know what he wants to make of them. He must possess force, either of command or of persuasion, to get rid of obstacles. But besides he must have, in small matters as well as great, a sense of the practical and the expedient. He must take care neither to be before nor after his time; he must know the limits of the possible; he must avoid neutralising his effort by the friction it creates. The true genius in statesmanship, like a great billiard player, gives an impression of ease, and even of inevitability; it is the mark of the second-rate man that he has, on occasion, to do something obviously brilliant; if he had been really first-rate the necessity would never have arisen.

When perception, energy, and judgment are present in the same individual in the highest degree and in perfect blending he becomes in any case a considerable, and, if circumstances favour, an epoch-making statesman: such men were Richelieu, Cavour, and (in a somewhat coarser kind) Bismarck. Mr Gladstone may be taken as an example of imperfect judgment (both of men and things) handicapping masterful energy and high intelligence. In

Mr Joseph Chamberlain energy predominated at the expense of the other qualities; his judgment was rather narrow and local; his parts were quick, but he lacked the power of taking in all sides of a problem of any great complexity. His habit was to act on feeling, and afterwards to think out justifications (to himself as well as to others) for his action. In mind, as in temperament, he was almost the exact opposite of the statesman whose character and career I propose to discuss.

Mr Balfour typifies the man of action in whom great powers of comprehension go with some deficiency of judgment and a marked deficiency of energy. The statement, of course, must be taken with due qualification. Judgment Mr Balfour has in large measure: few could compete with him in rapidly seizing the nature of a sudden emergency, while his views of more distant questions are often sound. But he has always appeared to experience some difficulty in getting all objects, near and remote, simultaneously in a just focus; his is not the automatic and almost infallible judgment of some great statesmen, contracting to the smallest details, expanding to the largest demands. Energy, also, he has often shown, energy fierce and impetuous, but it is a fitful energy, requiring the stimulus of a great occasion to arouse it; with success comes lethargy. Mr Balfour is constitutionally indolent—the effect partly of a too narrow margin of physical strength. But, like so many indolent men, he is capable of considerable periods of concentrated effort, and he is helped by an almost feminine obstinacy and dislike of admitting defeat. He lacks, however, that appetite for work, that restless impatience of inaction, that keen positive enjoyment of the exercise of power, which often carry men of quite inferior abilities to great heights.

Mr. Balfour

Statesmen of Mr Balfour's type seldom fail to achieve a peculiar kind of eminence; they rarely reach, and never maintain, the sort of power wielded by those who, with perhaps less liberal mental endowment, combine the shrewdest judgment with a steady, untiring, unresting industry. They are, however, often regarded more highly in their day and generation than men of far completer practical equipment. For contemporaries are unduly influenced by that particular set of qualities which enables men to excel in verbal contests. Large powers of comprehension and a good memory create an illusion of superiority even where it does not exist. When, as in the case under notice, they are combined with genuine intellectual power, the tendency is to yield quite irrational homage. Actual failure is not only condoned, but admired. Throughout his long career, Lord Rosebery was judged not by what he had done, but by some quite imaginary standard of what he might have done had he felt like it. To some extent Mr Balfour's case is similar. He has always been credited with an indefinable superiority over his performances. They have been notable; but it is vaguely felt that the man is more notable still; in the midst of his greatest failures he was more interesting than other men in their most triumphant success. With others the 'might-have-been' is a reproach; with men like Mr Balfour it is a tribute: they please in disappointing.

Arthur James Balfour was born at Whittinghame, near Prestonkirk, on the twenty-fifth of July, in that revolutionary *annus mirabilis*, 1848. The Balfours —the name is supposed to be derived from an estate called of old in Gælic 'Bal-Ore,' from its contiguity to a little stream called the Ore—are a very ancient

Lowland race; there were Balfours who bled with Wallace and triumphed with Bruce, and it is said that the blood of that monarch mingles with other aristocratic currents in the veins of Mr Balfour. The Balfours of Whittinghame are not, however, an old family in quite the same sense that the Paulets or the Somersets are old. Their acres, though broad and fair, are not ancestral acres; Whittinghame, a large undistinguished block of masonry rather resembling a section of one of the older squares of Brighton, has no family ghost or Holbein ancestors; it is only about a hundred years old, and what tradition clings about the spot has no relation to the Balfours. Whittinghame was built with the new gold brought from India by Mr Balfour's grandfather, one John Balfour of Balbirnie, who, going out to Madras, made £300,000 in the course of a very few years out of contracts for supplying the Navy with meat and other provisions. Leaving a fellow-Scot to manage the business for him at a salary of £6000 a year, he returned to these islands, bought one large estate in the Lowlands and another in the Highlands, and settled down at Whittinghame, almost before the mortar was dry, to enjoy the lairdly dignity which had been the lot of his ancestors.

In due course Whittinghame, with its goodly rent-roll, its well-ordered park, its fine views of the Lammermoors on the one side and of the Firth of Forth on the other, descended to Mr James Maitland Balfour, who married in her eighteenth year Lady Blanche Gascoigne-Cecil, daughter of the second Marquess of Salisbury and sister of that Lord Robert Cecil who was later to become the Victorian Burleigh. Lady Blanche's mother, a great social figure in her day, had enjoyed the close friendship of the Duke of Wellington; Lady Blanche herself as a child had

appealed strongly to all that was soft in that great veteran; and it was after the Duke that she named her first-born. Seven other children[1] were born when the shadow of a great sorrow descended on the sedately happy household. Of excellent abilities and amiable character, Mr James Maitland Balfour had been debarred by the delicacy of his constitution from following the career of public usefulness for which his short tenure of a seat in Parliament seemed to suggest he was qualified. Ill-health at last became complete invalidism; and escape to a less rigorous climate only purchased a brief respite. In 1854 he died in Madeira, and the care of the children and of the family estates devolved on his widow.

Lady Blanche Balfour was, fortunately, equal to her heavy responsibilities. Of a character always rare, and still rarer now than then, she seems to have been one of those women in whom pride of caste is tempered by humble piety and a delicate soul is allied with the shrewdest practical sense. In her breadth and her narrowness, in her absorption in her family, in her simple faith and imperious sense of duty, she recalls the gentle but spirited chatelaines of Thackeray. The story of the Whittinghame household, after the death of the master, reads almost like a page from *Esmond* or the early chapters of *Pendennis*. Calls from the neighbouring magnates, an occasional glimpse of the greater world when Lord Robert Cecil paid, like 'my brother the Major,' one of his

[1] Cecil Charles, died at thirty-two years of age.
Francis Maitland, distinguished in science, killed in Alpine climbing, 1882.
Gerald, afterwards Irish Secretary, President of the Board of Trade, etc.
Eustace James.
Alice (Miss Balfour).
Eleanor Mildred, afterwards wife of Professor Sidgwick.
Lady Rayleigh.

visits, entertainments to the tenantry or the labourers of the estate—such were the only variations in a homely routine. An excursion was an event, a hair-cutting an incident, a visitation of diphtheria almost a tragedy. During the great cotton famine the sufferings of the poor were impressed on the children in a manner quite practical and quite Victorian; they had to do their own work. 'Our establishment,' Mr Balfour once said, 'was reduced to the narrowest limits; my sisters helped to cook the dinner, and I helped to black the boots.' For the rest, the mother's eye was ever on the nursery; she saw to all its wants, material and intellectual, and it was through her evening readings that the future Prime Minister made his first acquaintance with the great romancers of England and (with a certain care in selection) of France.

At twelve the young heir made his first speech at a gathering of tenantry—the local paper adds 'in a most manly fashion'; and at fourteen he left his preparatory school for the wider world of Eton. Lord Salisbury was miserable there; his nephew seems to have succeeded in enjoying himself quite tolerably. His duties as fag to his future colleague, Lord Lansdowne, do not seem to have troubled him, and he got on well enough with both masters and boys. With the rather fragile physique inherited from both parents—the Cecils, like the Balfours, tended to lung trouble—he could not, like his schoolfellow, Lord Dalmeny (afterwards Earl of Rosebery and Prime Minister), play a distinguished part in sport. But he passed muster at football; lessons did not worry him; and he got through his school-days pleasantly enough to retain a contented recollection and a faith, orthodox if not specially robust, in the wisdom of the British public school system.

At Cambridge, his record was equally removed from brilliance or disgrace; he took his B.A. in 1870, with second-class honours in Moral Science, and left behind him at Trinity the memory of a young man of excellent natural powers, of good looks, and of pleasant manners (though rather shy), fond of music (he once owned four concertinas, on which he delighted to play Handel's oratorios when any one could be found to accompany him), perhaps a little effeminate, and certainly not a little lazy. He was renowned for the hours he would lie in bed, and for his passion for blue china and pleasant knick-knacks. The irreverent called him 'Pretty Fanny,' and his rooms were really a trifle suggestive of the bluestocking in their combination of the kind of material elegance and the kind of literary refinement which one may fairly call ladylike.

Two years later came the second great shock of his life; at the age of forty-seven his mother died; her body lies in Whittinghame Churchyard, and her memory is still cherished among the older inhabitants of the village.

If we are to understand the outlook of the wealthy, languid, sauntering, rather delicate young man thus early orphaned, we must revert to the fact that he entered the world at a time when certain ideas of much import to mankind were preparing to leave it. Every man's career is the resultant of outside influences acting on temperament. Our dispositions admit of no constitutional change; while it is true that a single event may change the whole current of a life it is none the less true that at every stage what is born in us affects the course and intensity of that current. In the case of Mr Balfour both temperament and circumstance tended in the same direction.

With little animal vigour, an intellect clear and vigorous but rather critical than creative, a certain coldness of imagination, a heart not over-responsive to things which thrill the vulgar, he had been brought up under conditions which permitted him little contact with the rough-and-tumble of life. At Whittinghame he moved amid a deference almost amounting to worship. At Eton he developed a dexterity in avoiding the kind of troubles most young people seek. At Cambridge he moved, as far as possible, in sybaritic isolation. He did not lack open-air tastes; hard walking and even deer-stalking appealed to him as a young man, and he nourished a sensitive horror of becoming fat or flabby; but his poor health was always a sufficient excuse for not joining in kinds of life for which he showed no taste; and his early seclusion nourished to a perhaps unwholesome degree the fastidiousness of his mind and temper. Of family pride he inherited a sufficiency; to it he added a curious intellectual arrogance which is visible in his earliest speeches and never quite absent from his more mature utterances. A profound conviction that what is popular must be vulgar seems to have been his from a very tender age; it is discernible in some of the speeches which a too zealous hero-worship has preserved.

On a temperament so little prone to enthusiasm the general lowering of temperature, political and theological, which characterised the latter half of the nineteenth century must have had a further chilling effect. The time of Mr Balfour's birth, roughly corresponding with the consummation of a revolution in English life, also witnessed the beginnings of a world-wide wave of reaction. He first saw the light two years after the repeal of the Corn Laws in England

and a few months after the fall of Louis Philippe in France. The great year of revolution, as it appeared to contemporaries, is now seen rather as the expiring flicker of an old conflagration. In every country insurrectionary movements were defeated either by force of arms or by adroit appeals to nationalistic ideals. France was soon found merely to have exchanged one irresponsible master for another; in Hungary the sword of the Czar and the rope of the Habsburg prepared the way for a more subtle policy; the last remnant of Polish independence was extinguished; in Germany a feeble democratic faith was overwhelmed, through the art of Bismarck, by a passion for empire without liberty. Every year of Mr Balfour's youth saw the current quicken, and he had scarcely reached full manhood when the ceremony at the Palace of the old French Kings proclaimed to those who had ears to hear that reaction, disguised as progress and equipped with superlative modern efficiency, was in the saddle, and would ride.

Sedan was a spiritual no less than a military defeat, and the effects of that defeat were quickly felt in England. The rise of Prussia to the first place on the Continent killed the old Liberalism. Much of its legislative fruit was gathered in the very year the Prussian armies were marching on Paris, but, as in the natural world, harvest coincided with the exhaustion of creative force; and before bearing time could come again the Bismarckian frost had set firmly in. A new tone of pessimism in speculation corresponded with the weakening of the reforming spirit in action. By mere inertia the old formulæ persisted; but the men who grew up between the fifties and the eighties were mainly a disillusioned race, lacking in positive faith and scarcely capable

of a decisive negative. Their attitude to all that commanded the respect of an earlier generation, from the whiskers of John Bright to the economics of Cobden, was an acquiescence without homage; they had neither energy to oppose nor to admire; all they could offer was a dubious and unconvinced conformity. The fashionable young man wore a wisp of hair under his ears—there are portraits of Mr Balfour thus—and paid lip-service to the gospel of free exchange. But he did so with reserve; the fashions and the economics of the last age might be respectable and true, since they were so very ugly and so very dull, but who could be expected to be enthusiastic over them?

Of this languid scepticism and exhausted acquiescence Mr Balfour was very fairly representative; and his early temper, persisting throughout life, explains much in his career. He has apparently never believed in Free Trade; but left alone he would never have challenged it. He has never fallen a victim to those democratic enthusiasms which occasionally cause alarm (happily quite transient) to ducal parents; on the other hand it would be wrong to describe him as 'reactionary.' In one sense he is hardly a true Conservative; while anxious to stand still as far as practicable, he has not hesitated on occasion to suggest quite revolutionary courses. His political philosophy is, indeed, not easily discoverable. His chief belief seems to be that sleeping dogs should be allowed to lie. 'The wise man,' he once said, 'is content in a sober and cautious spirit, with a full consciousness of his feeble powers of foresight and the narrow limits of his activity, to deal as they arise with the problems of his own generation.' This has been his rule. But when the dogs decline to sleep he cares little as to the particular

manner in which he disposes of them. Mr Balfour has generally elected to stand still unless pushed; when pushed beyond a certain point, he has acted always with decision, occasionally with recklessness. At times he showed himself so near to greatness that one wondered what he might have been with more robustness and an animating faith. At the end of his career one is still left wondering.

CHAPTER II

Mr Balfour entered Parliament in 1874 as member for the Borough of Hertford, which was then almost the property of the Cecil family. He was unopposed, and happened to be the first member declared elected. The event has a certain symbolical significance. The man who was to spend so much of his public life blocking Liberal programmes began it as a member of the first House after the Reform Bill which could be classed as at once fundamentally and intelligently anti-Liberal.

There had been some Tories in power, and plenty of Whigs, whose chief aim was to avoid or postpone change; the great peculiarity of the Disraelian régime from 1874 to 1880 was that it fought Liberalism not by the 'Everlasting Nay' but by an eager and even shrill affirmative of its own. It did not propose at all to stand still; its whole strategic conception was dynamic. It reproached Gladstone with being behind, instead of before, the times. Repudiating the title of the 'Stupid Party,' it sought to fasten that reproach upon the enemy. It professed the liveliest sympathy with the working man, tried (and with some success) to convince him that the Liberalism of men like Bright was a purely middle-class conception, and (this with less conspicuous triumph) argued that the welfare of the poor had been a constant object of Tory policy. Liberalism had always a cosmopolitan side; it believed in free trade in Liberal doctrines, and Manchester tenets were as much an article of export as Manchester cotton. The new Conservatism was passionately national, or (more

accurately) imperial. It drew a line of division as sharp as that of Mr Micawber. 'On the one side of this line,' said Mr Micawber, 'is the whole range of the human intellect, with a trifling exception; on the other *is* that exception; that is to say the affairs of Messrs Wickfield and Heep, with all belonging and appertaining thereto.' The affairs of humanity were left (with a sneer) to Mr Gladstone or his caretakers; the affairs of the Imperial firm, with all belonging and appertaining thereto (the Turkish Empire and so forth), were the exclusive concern of Mr Disraeli.

The new Conservatism judged everything from the standpoint of purely British interest, and it defined British interest in a manner at once materialistic and imaginative. The chief idea of Disraelian Imperialism was expansion: concrete gain in territory, money-making facilities, and prestige. But its eyes were rather too much at the ends of the earth, and it could not always distinguish—a failing common to all Imperialism—between solid advantage and showy but unsubstantial successes. The Disraelians grasped, as the Liberals never did, the truth that, given a highly militarised Continent and the precise form of industrial and commercial polity then established in the United Kingdom, the price of safety for Great Britain must be eternal vigilance. They saw that the Empire was not a naturally buoyant structure, like one of Nelson's frigates, which could stand a good deal of knocking about, but an extremely sinkable though mighty assemblage of machinery, like a modern battleship, only kept afloat by constant cunning and effort, and always liable to be sent to the bottom by a sudden or treacherous blow. That is to say, the leaders of the school saw all this; but their main strength was derived from the support of

those who held, in the crudest form, the comforting faith that the inherent superiority of the Briton was sufficient warrant against harm, however he might care to irritate or alarm his neighbours.

It would be unjust, however, to judge Mr Disraeli by the Jingoism he encouraged and used. The great master might often be misled by mere ignorance of facts, and his whole conception might be open to criticism; but it was a sure instinct which led him, thinking as he did, to scorn most of the dogmas of Liberalism, and especially its anti-militarist tradition. Given his standpoint, the rest was inevitable. If Great Britain was to pursue her Imperialist mission, if she was to expand at the present expense of one neighbour, and peg out claims to the future detriment of another, then she must expect and provide against the hostility of all at whose cost such development took place. Practically interpreted, such provision meant that she must abandon the Liberal idea of non-intervention in Continental affairs. She must take her seat at the gambling table and trust to her skill in finesse and bluff. She must permit nothing to happen on the Continent without her concurrence. She must pit one Power against another; especially she must contrive combinations against any Power threatening her Eastern possessions; and generally she must give up the pose of moral superiority and pursue a policy of long-sighted opportunism, without reference to any consideration but that of the country's influence and material greatness.

The election of 1874 proved that the nation was in more than one sense under the influence of the German victory of three years before. A large part of the electorate was by no means pleased by the attitude of Mr Gladstone's Government towards

the belligerents. Sympathy at first had been rather with Germany than with France, but the current of public opinion took a new turn when the completeness of the French defeat became apparent; and there was a considerable disposition to blame Mr Gladstone for his failure to proclaim Great Britain's interest and authority by intervening to secure a mitigation of the peace terms. But the main effect of the German triumph was due to what the Doctor in Dickens called 'the imitative instinct in the biped man.' While many were found to reprobate, there were still more to admire, the skill shown by Bismarck in provoking and steering to a highly profitable conclusion three successive wars. It was vaguely felt that a Bowdlerised version of such dexterity might have its uses in this country; in any case it would be no bad thing to oppose to unscrupulous foreign ability the subtlest brain among native statesmen.

For the rest, the prestige of Gladstone's greatest administration had worn itself out. The country was in one of those conservative moods which rarely fail to follow a great burst of reforming activity. The Government's work, much of it exceedingly valuable, had yet offended more than it pleased. There was no great popular enthusiasm for compulsory education, Irish disestablishment, abolition of purchase in the army, the ballot, and licensing reform; on the other hand, each and all of these measures had created powerful and pertinacious enemies. The clergy were Conservative agents almost to a man. The military men, except for a few young soldiers, harboured keen resentment over what they regarded as high-handed interference with their rights. Every public-house was a centre of proselytising energy. Lowe's match tax had

wantonly created one of those small popular grievances of which Liberal Governments in particular should beware. There was point, if there was not truth, in Disraeli's sneer as to ' Plundering and Blundering,' ' harassing every trade and worrying every profession.' Moreover, the late Government had suffered from those dissensions which are perhaps a Liberal law of nature, but to which Gladstonian administrations were certainly liable in a peculiar degree. Every Radical was against all Whigs, and one Whig was against another. The Government had sustained a serious defeat over its extraordinarily tactless Irish University Bill. Having dealt the Ministry a fatal blow, Disraeli let it bleed to death like a smitten calf, conscious that he would not have long to wait, and that the veal would be all the whiter on the table. He was right. In an atmosphere of defeat the disruptive forces within the Ministry rapidly increased, and at the moment of dissolution Mr Gladstone was in acute difference with his two most powerful subordinates over his plan (it now seems marvellously Utopian) for the abolition of the income-tax. If the British people had really liked the income-tax, they could not have chosen a better means to ensure its permanence. Mr Disraeli promptly took measures which set all question at rest as to the abolition of this impost.

Sir William Harcourt had long seen the smash coming. It was a very complete smash when it came. It was not alone that Mr Disraeli commanded a powerful majority. The opposition had almost disappeared. Mr Gladstone went into retirement; Lord Hartington, reluctantly assuming titular leadership, found himself less the chief of a party than the butt of a number of mutually hostile factions, only agreeing in repudiating his authority. Complete

apathy succeeded to the stirring atmosphere of contention which had so long reigned; Disraeli ostentatiously withdrew himself, much as a modern statesman has done, from the debates, and left in charge a knot of men whose main distinction was their utter lack of it. Sir Stafford Northcote, gentle and fair-minded, but rather lacking in vigour, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, hard-headed and not specially soft-hearted, were almost the only figures on the Conservative side that rose above the level of the commonplace; the Liberal Front Benches were scarcely more distinguished; Mr Bright had ceased to take much share in debate, and Mr Gladstone hardly ever entered the House. Two men who were to make history in the next decade had not yet appeared at Westminster: in 1875 Mr Parnell was elected for Meath and Mr Chamberlain was returned for Birmingham in 1876.

Mr Balfour took little interest in this tepid assembly. To most people the House of Commons is an acquired taste, and young men, especially, are apt to be repelled equally by its boredom and its bustle: the boredom is always so self-evident, the meaning of the bustle is often so obscure. Mr Balfour, too, carried to rather excessive length the exhaustion fashionable among the youth of the period. He was a member, if not the actual inventor, of the Society called 'the Souls,' and his manner was that of those laboriously nonchalant young men of whom Dickens made fun, sometimes kindly and sometimes malicious. His first year was spent as a silent member; in 1875 he went on a tour of the world, and it was not until 1876 that he made his maiden speech; the subject was bi-metallism, a matter which has always interested him and which cast early doubts on his economic orthodoxy.

There is generally little profit in disinterring the early utterances of eminent men, but two characteristic examples may be noticed. Much to the amusement of his uncle, Mr Beresford Hope, Mr Balfour argued for equality between men and women regarding University degrees, but opposed woman suffrage on the conventional grounds then common; that politics were not 'women's sphere,' that the vote would give rise to regrettable controversies in the home circle, that women were influenced by sentiment rather than reason, and so forth. On another occasion Mr Balfour showed liberality in advance of his party in protesting against the burial disabilities to which Nonconformists were then subject; he showed so much pertinacity in pressing a measure of his own to remove this grievance that an honest Tory, referring to the Ground Game Bill, which was being discussed at the same time, growled 'He cares a dashed deal more for a dead Dissenter than for a live rabbit.' In the course of a closely argued speech Mr Balfour warned the Church against maintaining an arrogant attitude which would deprive it of the sympathy of broad-minded people otherwise not unfriendly.

These speeches serve to show that the young member's mind was, in essentials, what it remained in later life. Illiberal in the true sense Mr Balfour has never been; intellectually, indeed, he has always indulged a scorn for any kind of narrowness. A Nonconformist being dead, Mr Balfour was extremely willing for him to be buried in a polite and tolerant manner; to any single Dissenter, to any class of Dissenter, to any number of Dissenters, he was ready to accord this privilege. But he was less ready to consider the claims of Nonconformists who were inconveniently (and perhaps unwarrantably) alive. Again, he had no objection to a woman calling herself

M.A., because that did no particular harm, if it did no particular good. But she must not call herself M.P., or even vote to make an M.P., because that meant the one thing Mr Balfour has always resisted —it meant a difference.

Mr Balfour at this time is described as very long, very thin, a little languid, a little affected, with an extremely agreeable voice (not yet, however, with quite the full and rich timbre of a later period), a manner which could be at will extraordinarily winning and slightly offensive, and a trick, already noticeable, of saying nasty things neatly. His political bias had thus early declared itself with sufficient decision, but he had as yet given no serious thought to particular questions, and his occasional interventions in debate were still marked by a debating society ingenuousness. He was content to follow the lead of his distinguished uncle, who gave him at this time (it is Mr Balfour himself who speaks) 'words of encouragement which live and germinate and affect the whole future life and character of those to whom they are addressed.' Lord Salisbury, once bitterly critical of Mr Disraeli, had become completely reconciled to his leadership, and Mr Balfour had already attracted the notice of the Prime Minister, whose shrewd eye had detected the talent that lay concealed behind his exhausted manner. 'Arthur Balfour will be a second Pitt,' is said to have been Mr Disraeli's remark on one occasion. Lord Salisbury's nephew could not be altogether a cipher in the political society of the day, and the years between 1874 and 1880—barren as they are in the record—must have had a great educational influence. But Mr Balfour was in no sense a Parliamentary figure when, in 1878, he had his first glimpse into the larger political life. Lord Salisbury took him as

his private secretary to the Berlin Conference, and though the real business had been secretly transacted beforehand, there was plenty, in the way of personalities and stage effects, to occupy an observant, reflective and ironical mind. Its ironical side must have fully appreciated the sequel to the junketings of Berlin and the delirious triumph of London.

If 1870 was the high-water mark of Gladstonian Liberalism, 1878 saw Disraelian Imperialism at the climax of its glory. When the Prime Minister returned with his sheaves, and all England shouted for 'Peace with Honour,' few could have been prepared for the swift reaction which was to follow. Liberalism seemed at the lowest depths of impotence and disrepute. Mr Gladstone was so unpopular in London that he once had actually to take refuge from the resentment of a Jingo crowd. But in British politics the most dangerous moment for a public man is that at which all that is vocal sings his praises. London is not England, still less Britain; and while the Metropolitan clubs and music-halls were still attributing to Mr Disraeli a degree of infallibility many Roman Catholics were then risking excommunication rather than concede to the Pope, the provinces were moodily reckoning up the cost of Imperialism and grudgingly weighing its visible fruits. Small but expensive wars were placed against illusory gains like that of Cyprus; the depression in trade and increased taxation were compared with the golden plenty of the early seventies; it was recalled, with a due sense of the satire of things, that Mr Gladstone had fallen while meditating the abolition of the income-tax.

Taking advantage of this revulsion, the veteran Liberal chief embarked, nominally as a private individual, really as the head of a rejuvenated party,

on the famous Midlothian campaign. The Liberal Party, which seemed in 1874 to have fallen into permanent dissolution, quickly regained tone and aggressiveness; and the first few days of the General Election of 1880 showed that the chapter of Disraelian Imperialism had closed. When it was all over the Liberals had a maiority of forty-one over all parties, and at the age of seventy, despite the wishes of the Crown and of the retiring Prime Minister, Mr Gladstone again assumed office.

Mr Balfour had this time to fight the borough of Hertford against Mr E. E. Bowen, a Harrow master and brother of Lord Bowen. On a total poll of 964 he had 164 votes to spare; the majority happened to correspond almost exactly with the number of houses owned by Lord Salisbury in Hertford. During the last two years he had taken a somewhat more conspicuous part in debate, and had been entrusted with one or two speeches in defence of the Government's foreign policy. In the performance of this duty he crossed swords for the first time with one who was destined to determine much of his political life. Mr Joseph Chamberlain, who lost no occasion to denounce Imperialism, and had called Mr Disraeli 'a man who never told the truth except by accident,' attacked the British plenipotentiaries at the Berlin Conference as being the 'ready and willing champions of great despotisms' and 'as repressing the aspirations and limiting the claims of subject nationalities.' Mr Balfour complained of Mr Chamberlain's 'most bitter harangues,' and stigmatised him as one of those who 'remembered too much that they belonged to different parties, and too little that they belonged to the same country.' The keenest political prophet of the time could hardly have foreseen the day when Mr Chamberlain, as the great missionary of Empire,

would serve under the uncle and nephew whom he censured for their part in the last great settlement of Europe before the war of 1914. Nor could Mr Balfour, though long-sighted as most, have had the smallest presentiment of the ultimate effects of the policy he then defended. To statesmen the art of shorthand reporting, which embalms their confident utterances for the easy ridicule of later generations, must seem indeed an invention of the evil one.

CHAPTER III

The House in which Mr Balfour now found himself was in many respects widely different from any of its predecessors. For the first time the more modern type of Radicalism was represented on the Front Bench—at the Board of Trade by Mr Chamberlain, and at the Foreign Office by Sir Charles Dilke, whose position as Under Secretary was the more important since Lord Granville was now by no means the man he had been ten years earlier.

At this distance it is not a little difficult to realise the distrust respectable people felt concerning Mr Chamberlain. He was a highly substantial man, respectable and religious, with all his 'h's' and a decided 'stake in the country.' In the last Parliament his spruce appearance and 'freedom from provincialism'—many good people really seemed to envisage the Radical Mayor as a sort of Keir Hardie—had abated apprehensions of personal misbehaviour. But he was still generally regarded not only as a Republican, which was perhaps serious, but as a Socialist, which was very serious indeed; Socialism was then less an economic heresy than a moral taint; and to most good men and women Mr Chamberlain's real constituency was not Birmingham but 'a city much like London.' Moreover, he expressed views which were then thought extreme with a vigour which would perhaps always be thought excessive. Mr Balfour himself seems to have seen in Mr Chamberlain little but a demagogue with an itch for destruction. 'His object,' he said, 'is to make Whiggism impossible and moderate Liberalism impossible. . . . All the

elements—the valuable and useful elements—which now prevent it being homogeneous and exclusively Radical—he means to drive out. If he means to do it, depend upon it he will succeed in doing it. . . . As soon as Mr Gladstone retires from the cares of political life, then it will be that Mr Chamberlain will, as I have said, make Whiggism an impossibility and an anachronism. . . . I fear both good feeling and moderation may vanish in the political struggles of the future.' If such were really the view of Mr Balfour, with his cool temper and clear understanding, can it be matter for surprise that the impression Mr Chamberlain made on more fervid minds was that of a dangerous character?

The proper-minded were further scandalised by the return for Northampton of Mr Charles Bradlaugh, a militant atheist of a type now unfamiliar, who refused to take the oath like more accommodating infidels, and whose pertinacity was destined to worry Mr Gladstone far more than many more weighty matters with which the next few years were to perplex him. Mr Parnell, already *de facto* and soon to become *de jure* leader of the Irish Nationalists, had behind him a solid phalanx to whom his will was law; he ruled them by the power of a mysteriously frigid personality, in which no Irish characteristic could be detected.

An odd sympathy and co-operation grew up between this dictator and one who, differing in most other things, resembled him in losing no chance of flouting his titular chief. Lord Randolph Churchill, a younger son of the Duke of Marlborough, and member for the family borough of Woodstock, believed in applying to his party leaders what, in the slang of a later day, has been called 'ginger.' He was backed by Sir Henry Drummond Wolff and

Mr John Gorst, both attached to the Disraelian tradition, and inclined to attribute its decay to the lukewarmness or worse of what Lord Randolph called the 'old gang' of Conservatism. These three received the nickname of the Fourth Party. Apart from the Irishmen, they supplied the only effective opposition to the Government, which they harried with an ability most practically recognised by Mr Gladstone, one of whose weaknesses was that he could always be 'drawn' by anybody bold enough to face batteries which were terrifying enough for most people, but which Lord Randolph treated with nonchalant disdain. The worst excesses of regular warfare are mild as compared with the cruelties of internecine strife, and the most venomous attacks of the Fourth Party, their bitterest scorn, their most biting invective, their most industrious spite, their most potent malice, were reserved for the gentle-mannered Sir Stafford Northcote, who led the regular opposition.

Mr Balfour is generally included in the membership of the Fourth Party. But he was a distinctly irregular auxiliary. 'We did not take him very seriously,' said Sir John Gorst in a reminiscent mood. 'His æsthetic tastes and love of music were something of a joke among us.' Lord Randolph Churchill, indeed, used to call him Postlethwaite, after the æsthete in *Patience*, and, though there was some intimacy between them, their tastes were too far apart for them to become exactly friends. Lord Randolph used sometimes to say to Mr Balfour, 'Go and take my wife to a concert while I stay and talk real business.' The truth was probably spoken, as far as an epigrammatic generalisation can express it, by the Irish Member who said, 'Drummond Wolff started the Fourth Party; Gorst made it; Churchill led it; Balfour adorned it.' The same witness,

Mr F. H. O'Donnell, adds that, 'Balfour was a member of the Fourth Party in the body, while always communing in the spirit with the Conservative Front Bench. Witty, judicious, observant, latent, uncompromised, not too much of an insurgent ever to draw the lightning, enough of an objector to heighten the value of his approbation, he trod with graceful freedom the *via media* between decorous independence and official responsibility. . . . With all his judicious reluctance he was a good comrade to the Fourth Party, without ceasing to maintain his succession to more permanent honours.'

Not policy alone but temperament prevented Mr Balfour from throwing in his lot without reservation with the Frondeurs. He was not sufficiently fond of hard work, and had far too much impatience of detail—a continuing characteristic—to undertake all the labour and minute investigation the character of the complete Fourth Party man demanded. For the others no drudgery was too great if Ministers could be made to look foolish, if a squirm could be induced in the sensitive Sir Stafford Northcote or the solid Mr W. H. Smith. They used the pick and the spade as joyfully as the blunderbuss and the broadsword. Mr Balfour, then as always, hated to 'prepare.' The thing that could be evolved out of his inner consciousness, with the aid of a few facts from *The Times* or a Bluebook that came handy—that he would say, and say with effect. But he revolted from the patient sapping and mining which were pure joy to Lord Randolph and his confederates. He could declare off-hand, with equal relish and effect, that Mr Chamberlain's criticisms of the House of Lords 'consisted in about equal proportions of bad history, bad logic, and bad taste,' or suggest that certain

speeches of that pushing politician would have earned him, in Ireland, a plank bed and prison cocoa. He could say witty things like that not unjustified sneer at John Bright, who 'calls the electorate the residuum when he disagrees with them and the people when they agree with him.' But he could not hunt through Hansard for 'what Mr Gladstone said in 1872.' Occasionally, however, his contributions to debate suggested to the discerning that the lackadaisical young laird had much more in him than any of the party, with the possible exception of Lord Randolph himself.

Such a speech was that in which he denounced the so-called 'Kilmainham treaty,' by which, it was alleged, Mr Parnell and other Irish members had been released from prison on the understanding that, if they would work for peace in Ireland, the Government would bring in a Bill with regard to arrears of rent, as a preliminary to dealing with larger Irish questions. The Government had denied that there was any such compact. 'It appears to me,' said Mr Balfour, 'that it is very much a matter of words.' He then quoted the 'Bourgeois Gentilhomme,' whose father was not a merchant, but being 'very officious' and having a good taste in cloth, kept a lot of stuffs in his house, and let his friends have them, they in their turn giving him presents of money. 'There was no sale; simply an exchange of gifts. In the same way the Government have not entered into a compact; they have only given the honourable gentlemen behind them something they very much desired, and the honourable gentlemen have, on their part, given the Government something they very much desired. . . . I do not think any such transaction can be quoted from the annals of our political history. It stands alone in its infamy.'

To this attack, which first suggested to some political observers the probable lines of Mr Balfour's future career, Mr Gladstone replied with a heat and an emphasis which, while witnessing to his indignation, could also be interpreted as a sort of inverted compliment. Mr Gladstone, in fact, had a good deal of liking for Mr Balfour, whom he frequently singled out for compliment as 'a man of great ability, who may look to obtain further distinction in the councils of the Empire.' A generous appreciation of young talent, especially of young aristocratic talent, was one of the most touching characteristics of Mr Gladstone; and, though he seems to have been genuinely hurt by the strength of Mr Balfour's language, he did not let many suns go down on the wrath evoked by this slashing attack. The old Parliamentary hand, indeed, would soon have succumbed had he allowed such minor matters to disturb more than momentarily his equanimity. Ireland, where Mr Forster's government ('almost as unpopular as it is inefficient,' as Mr Balfour described it in a sentence which did more harm among Liberals than many volumes of denunciation) nearly brought about a dissolution of society, was saved from total ruin by Earl Spencer's judiciously firm handling. But what hope of settlement there might have existed when Mr Parnell left Kilmainham had been dashed by the Phœnix Park murders, and Irish national feeling was never more bitterly inflamed against England than when Earl Spencer could report that the country was, as compared with its state in 1882, almost peaceful. But, apart from Ireland, the Government was almost perpetually in trouble. Egypt, the Sudan, Gordon —these were words of terror to a Prime Minister who had come into office largely through disgust

over foreign complications and mismanaged military affairs; and it was almost with eagerness that Mr Gladstone resigned when his Budget was defeated on June 8, 1885, on the question of an increase of the beer duty.

Pallas te hoc vulnere. It was the Parnellites, acting in unison with Lord Randolph Churchill (of whom, rightly or wrongly, they had high hopes), who dealt the fatal blow. Lord Randolph's exultant shout, and the cry of 'coercion' from the Irish Benches, had point for those who had watched, during many months, the curious growth of relations between the Third (or Home Rule) Party and the Fourth.

It had begun over the Bradlaugh controversy. The English Tories of the Extreme Right, no doubt highly scandalised as Churchmen, but perhaps even more ready as politicians to make the best use of a convenient stick with which to hit the Government, discovered a fellow-feeling among the Irish Roman Catholics, who were genuinely appalled by the free-thinker and all his works. To the Irish Bradlaugh was, not just an ordinary infidel, but a dirty fellow; he had been associated with certain publications which, to the Irish mind (so sensitive on all questions of sex morality) were merely abominable. It was with difficulty that Mr Parnell and Mr T. P. O'Connor could persuade a fraction of the Irish Party to vote with the Liberals in favour of relaxing the oath test in Bradlaugh's favour; the rest followed Lord Randolph Churchill. Egyptian affairs extended the singular alliance thus singularly begun. Lord Randolph championed Arabi Pasha, and declared that we had embarked on a 'bondholders' war,' and, coached by Mr Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, was able to make things uncomfortable for Mr Gladstone, to whom the very name of Egypt was nauseous. On

the Irish side nothing was known about Arabi except that he had declared for 'Egypt for the Egyptians,' but that was enough; it was sufficiently like 'Ireland for the Irish' to make Nationalist hearts beat with responsive emotion. Perhaps fortunately for Mr Balfour, in view of his subsequent policy, he had very little to do with this particular 'union of hearts.' In all these intrigues, if such they can be called, the part played by him was insignificant. He was not in the inner councils of the Fourth Party, and his co-operation was always sufficiently non-committal. Referring to the 'cordial relations' existing between the Third and Fourth Parties, the Irish witness above quoted interjects: 'Cordial might be too warm an adjective to Mr Balfour, who never failed to maintain a semi-aloofness suitable to the heir-presumptive of the Conservative leadership.' Elsewhere he likens Churchill to the deadly D'Artagnan, and Mr Balfour to the 'exquisite Aramis'—who, readers of Dumas will remember, kept high company, and always had his own little private affairs which he kept quite distinct from the general interests of the quartet.

By this time, indeed, Mr Balfour had, in Aramis's own way, gone some considerable distance on Aramis's road of ambition. In the House of Commons he was still far from a commanding figure. Certain speeches, like that cited above, and like his indictment of the Government for failing to relieve Gordon, had elicited the favourable comment of competent judges, and he had acquired a special reputation for stinging but 'good form' retort. But though he gave some promise for the future, he could not yet be called a good speaker or dependable debater. This judgment, of course, was formed at a time when the level of House of Commons speaking was

generally far higher than to-day; Mr Balfour at his best could hardly have dominated the Chamber of the eighties as he did that of a more recent period. His status behind the scenes was, however, more considerable than that which he occupied on the lighted stage. He received the confidence of Lord Salisbury, and was the chief agent by whom that statesman kept in touch with the Lower House. He began to know everything and everybody; was entrusted with delicate negotiations; and enjoyed the fullest opportunities of improving talents which in truth fitted him more for the silent service of an autocrat than for the control of a popular assembly. 'Arthur thinks us a vulgar lot,' said Sir William Harcourt; and there was some point in his jocularity. Mr Balfour got to know well all the ways of the House of Commons, and could play with it adroitly. But he never gained that perfect understanding which (as of a lover with his mistress) implies also perfect trust, and always seemed to resent as slightly wanting in taste the House's questioning of the divine right of ministries.

The situation produced by the defeat of the Government was singular. Mr Gladstone was the only statesman (since the death of Lord Beaconsfield) who had occupied the position of Prime Minister, and there was then no leader of the Conservative Party as a whole. Queen Victoria, passing over the claims of Sir Stafford Northcote, as senior statesman and leader of the House of Commons, at once sent for Lord Salisbury, who, after raising difficulties, consented on terms to accept office. The Queen's choice was important to Mr Balfour's career. He could hardly have been *persona grata* to the victim of his vivacious friends. On the other hand he was doubly sure of consideration from his uncle, who,

even if he were disposed to be unresponsive to the call of blood and the claims of rapidly developing ability, could not ignore the great services of the Fourth Party. Those services were in truth handsomely recognised, especially when count is taken of the youth and inexperience of its members. Lord Randolph entered the Cabinet as Secretary for India; Sir John Gorst was made Solicitor-General; and Mr Balfour became President of the Local Government Board; while a diplomatic appointment was accepted by Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, much to the surprise of many who imagined that this cynical and brilliant man, the virtual founder of the Primrose League, had much higher game in view. The Salisbury Government was of course simply a company of caretakers; its business was to wind up the session, and dissolve. In the election, which took place in the late autumn of 1885, the Liberals fared badly in the Boroughs, and especially in London, but in the counties the newly-enfranchised agricultural labourers, going to the poll in thousands in support of the Radical agricultural policy renowned in the slang of the day as 'three acres and a cow,' more than redressed the balance. The eventual Liberal majority was eighty-five, not counting the Irish Nationalists either way. If the Nationalists were counted against the Government the Liberal majority disappeared.

Mr Balfour in this election successfully contested the Eastern Division of Manchester against Professor Hopkinson, of Owens College; his majority was 824. It is interesting, in view of subsequent events, to note one point in his address after the declaration of the poll. 'Glad,' he said, 'as the Radical Ministers would be to purchase office at any moment by yielding to Irish pressure, there is not one cardinal point of

their policy that they hold in common with the Irish people. *That is not the case with the Conservatives.* There is one principle which the Conservatives hold as earnestly as the party to which Mr Parnell belongs, and *for which they may well be found fighting side by side*, and that is the principle of religious education. On that question the Tory Party and the Roman Catholic Party and the Parnellite Party are absolutely at one. The Irish policy and the foreign policy of the late Government were wholly without excuse, and *so long as Mr Parnell and his friends confine their attacks to the Irish policy and the foreign policy* they will find no great difference between themselves and the Conservative Party.'

These words certainly suggest no such implacable hostility to Home Rule and the Home Rule Party as Mr Balfour's speeches of a slightly later date imply. They are rather friendly than otherwise. But it must be remembered that Mr Balfour spoke at an early stage in the elections, when it looked as if Lord Salisbury's Government would be maintained in power. Mr Parnell had advised Irish voters in British constituencies to vote for Conservative candidates; Lord Salisbury had made speeches which might be interpreted, and certainly were in some quarters interpreted, as not hostile at least to an examination of Home Rule; Lord Carnarvon, who had advanced views on Ireland, had been appointed Irish Viceroy; 'cordial relations' had existed in the last Parliament between Lord Randolph Churchill, now a powerful Conservative Minister, and the Parnellites. The Cabinet did not know, but Mr Balfour may have known (as Lord Salisbury certainly did) that Lord Carnarvon had met Mr Parnell in a private house in London, and had discussed with him a plan for the creation of an Irish Parliament.

Exactly what was said at the meeting was never known, but the Irish were certainly under the impression, first that Lord Carnarvon was in favour of some sort of Home Rule (in which they were right), and secondly that he had behind him the support of the Cabinet (in which they were wrong). In whatever degree he may have been privy to these proceedings, Mr Balfour was evidently seized of knowledge which compelled him, in his Manchester campaign, to sit on the fence, with his feet on the Irish side.

What would have happened had the counties gone the way of the Boroughs, and Lord Salisbury had found himself, as Mr Gladstone did, dependent on the Irish vote? The speculation, however tempting, is idle. We know what did happen. Finding that Mr Gladstone had decided for Home Rule, while Lord Hartington and other influential Liberals were invincibly hostile to that policy, the Conservative leaders pursued a course which might or might not have been theirs had circumstances been reversed; and soon Lord Randolph Churchill, forgetting his own immersion in 'Parnellite juice,' was shouting that 'Ulster would fight and Ulster would be right.' Mr Gladstone's intentions became known through a communication in two newspapers just before Christmas, and immediately Lord Hartington wrote to the Chairman of his Committee announcing his adhesion to all that he had said during the election, things excessively uncomplimentary to the Irish, and uncompromisingly adverse to any suggestion of Home Rule. A few days later Mr Balfour and Mr Gladstone were fellow-guests of the Duke of Westminster at Eaton Hall. Mr Gladstone, a little innocent for his age, and honestly anxious for an Irish settlement irrespective of party politics, sounded the younger statesman as to the possibility

of co-operation with the Prime Minister, in accordance with the precedent set by Peel in regard to the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. Mr Balfour, very old for his age, and fully aware of the plight in which Mr Gladstone found himself, was perfectly polite but perfectly inscrutable. While expressing no opinion on the proposal, he agreed to communicate it. Whether it was ever considered may well be doubted; Mr Gladstone, with all his experience, had under-rated the strength of party feeling and the temptations of party advantage. At any rate the invitation was rejected with decision; the Prime Minister merely replied that the Government's policy would be stated when Parliament met. With the opening of Parliament all was made clear; Lord Carnarvon retired; the Queen's speech contained an emphatic pronouncement against any disturbance of that 'fundamental law'—the 'legislative union between that country (Ireland) and Great Britain'; it was evident that the Prime Minister, if he had ever entertained doubts as to his course of action, entertained them no longer. Meanwhile it had become daily more certain that the Liberal Party must be rent in twain; and when Mr Gladstone took office, after the defeat of the Government on the 'three acres and a cow' motion, everybody foresaw the split which took place a few months later. It is unnecessary here to trace the negotiations between Gladstonian Liberals and Liberal Unionists which proceeded through the spring and early summer of 1886 before the defeat of the first Home Rule Bill. The verdict of the House of Commons was more emphatically repeated by the country in the succeeding General Election, and Lord Salisbury became, for a second time, Prime Minister.

Mr Balfour was opposed in East Manchester,

but retained the seat by a majority of 644. In the new Government he accepted the post of Secretary for Scotland, and in the following November was admitted to the Cabinet. A month later Lord Randolph Churchill resigned his new post of Chancellor of the Exchequer, because Lord Salisbury would not support him in his demand for the reduction of naval and military estimates; and with him went the whole plan of 'Tory democracy.' It was a severe blow to the Government, and the Prime Minister momentarily yielded to something like panic; fortunately he remembered (after sending post-haste to the Duke of Devonshire in Italy), what Lord Randolph had forgotten, namely Mr Goschen. The sensation had hardly died away when another retirement gave Mr Balfour his great opportunity. Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, affected with a temporary failure of eyesight, sought relief from the thankless and heavy labours of the Irish Secretaryship, and Mr Balfour was announced, on March 6, 1887, as his successor.

CHAPTER IV

Lord Salisbury as Prime Minister was much of a dormouse. Engrossed in his duties as Foreign Secretary, he took little continuous interest in matters of domestic concern, and the details of the Irish tangle he surveyed with mingled disgust and bewilderment. At the Foreign Office he was absolute; he took nobody into his confidence, and managed the country's correspondence much as he might have done that of the Cecil estates. The rest he was only too glad to leave to anybody he could trust. It is said that he did not know some members of his Cabinet except by sight; he certainly could not have given a list of the personnel of the administration. It was, therefore, a main consideration with him, in filling the Irish Secretaryship, that he should have a Minister who knew his mind, who would not bother him with details, and with whom he could always maintain close touch without too much trouble. His own recipe for Ireland was simplicity itself: 'Twenty years of resolute government—government that does not flinch, that does not vary, government that they cannot hope to beat down by agitation, government that does not alter with party changes at Westminster.' This recipe he believed Mr Balfour better capable than any other statesman of carrying into effect. He had long conceived a strong admiration for his nephew's qualities. He knew, as no one else did, how much experience of the hidden side of public affairs Mr Balfour had been quietly accumulating during his Fourth Party and early ministerial days. He had a shrewd idea of a side of the young

statesman's character that was not then visible to the world; his discretion, his tenacity, the obstinacy of which he was capable when his interest was fully engaged and his self-love implicated. The appointment, in short, was no doubt a bold experiment, but it was certainly not a rash one. Lord Salisbury had carefully considered his own comfort of mind, as well as what he conceived to be the public interest, before he made his decision.

On Mr Balfour's side the acceptance of the offer denoted political courage of the highest order. The state of Ireland was, indeed, far less menacing than when Lord Spencer set forth on his desperate enterprise; Ireland was at this time comparatively free of crime. But the situation was still sufficiently serious. The National League had in its grip all Southern and Western Ireland, and a large part of Ulster. Though quickly declared an illegal conspiracy, the 'Plan of Campaign' (a combination which aimed at fighting the landlords with their own rents) had made great headway. Organised assassination had ceased, but there was still agrarian crime here and there, and the processes of ordinary law were rendered futile by the impossibility of getting Irish juries to convict. The work of directing Irish Government in such circumstances was sufficiently formidable; but administration was only one part of the Irish Secretary's duties. His further task was to deal with the House of Commons, containing a large body of Gladstonian Liberals hostile and suspicious, a smaller body of Liberal Unionists not a little doubtful concerning the new alliance, and eighty-six Parnellite members: men experienced in every form of obstruction, of inexhaustible ingenuity in attack, led with great ability by a chief who had in his own opinion reason to regard the head of the

Government as having tricked him, and all working for a common purpose with the fury of Crusaders and the discipline of Guardsmen.

Every statesman who had held the office since the rise of Parnell had failed. Most of them had retired broken in health and bankrupt in public reputation. The overbearing Mr Forster had fared no better than the mild Sir George Trevelyan; the strain had been too much for the cold and impassive Sir Michael Hicks-Beach. The new Secretary was, on the face of things, more likely than any of his predecessors to succumb to the terrible physical wear and tear. Years before, with his consumptive tendencies, he had been faced with the prospect of regular winter exile; a discerning doctor, however, had suggested as an alternative to climate-hunting the excitement of hard work, and the prescription had so far worked well enough; at thirty-nine the early weakness seemed fairly outgrown. But the medicine in such excessive dose as was to be expected at the Irish Office might well prove fatal, and Mr Balfour, before committing himself, consulted an eminent physician. He was given satisfactory assurances, and, free from immediate anxiety on this point, threw himself with ardour into his new duties. His faith in his own powers proved to be justified. Though he looked sometimes haggard and ghastly, his constitution held out, and at the end of the ordeal he was on the whole a stronger man than at the beginning.

The appointment caused general surprise. In Ireland it was received with derision; in England (except by *The Times*, which paid tribute to Mr Balfour's 'fresh, clear, and alert intelligence') with misgiving or anticipatory satisfaction according to the point of view. 'An Irish Secretary,' said the

Pall Mall Gazette, 'should be as tough as catgut and as hard as nails. Mr Balfour is the very antithesis of a pachyderm. Lord Salisbury may be anxious to avoid the charge of nepotism; but this is nepotism the other way about—nepotism not of the patronising but of the murderous order. To offer Mr Balfour the Irish Office is like the presentation of a silken bowstring to the doomed victim of the Caliph.' The *Daily News* described the new Irish Secretary as 'perhaps the best specimen of the pure cynic in modern politics.' The Irish papers at first exhausted their ingenuity to find adequate images of contempt. Mr Balfour was 'a Daddy Long-legs,' 'a butterfly to be broken on the wheel,' 'a lily,' 'a palsied masher' ('masher' being late Victorian for fop), an 'Epicurean aristocrat,' 'a silk-skinned sybarite whose rest a crumpled rose-leaf would disturb.' Such were the epithets showered on Mr Balfour while it was believed that he was to be only another addition to the long list of failures at the Irish Office. But an abrupt change in the character of the disparagement testified to the new Secretary's real strength. A few weeks later he was described, not with elaborate contempt, but with simple and emphatic hatred; the favourite adjective was 'bloody.' To call the Irish Secretary 'bloody Balfour' seemed to yield some mysterious satisfaction to Irish politicians and journalists. It could not be grudged them; it was really almost the only satisfaction they got.

Mr Balfour's policy in Ireland involved many complicated measures, but the essence of it may be quite shortly stated. His first aim was to put down disorder, and to effect this he availed himself of the full power of the law; if the law did not give powers full enough, then he either strained the law or altered it; in his hatred of lawlessness he sometimes verged

on illegality. His second aim was to improve Irish economic conditions; with statesmanlike perception he recognised that a large part of the Irish distemper was simply poverty, and that agrarian crime must be expected while the greater part of the population 'trembled constantly on the verge of want.' He has himself summarised his policy as well as it can be expressed in brief. 'Cromwell failed,' he said, 'because he relied solely on repressive measures. This mistake I shall not imitate. I shall be as relentless as Cromwell in enforcing obedience to the law, but at the same time I shall be as radical as any reformer in redressing grievances and especially in removing every cause of complaint in regard to the land. Hitherto English Governments have stood first upon one leg and then upon the other. They have either been all for repression or all for reform. I am for both; repression stern as Cromwell, reform as thorough as Mr Parnell or any one else can desire.' So far as it went the policy was sound. It was courageous and it was intelligent, and Mr Balfour's courage has always been as remarkable as his intelligence; one who cannot be classed as a consistent admirer has called him 'the most courageous man alive.' Mr Balfour's one mistake was natural to a man of his caste and his habit of mind. He conceived that all could be put right by handcuffs well and duly applied, and by money well and duly spent. He could not see that, amid all its squalors, inconsistencies and worse, there was a genuine spiritual element in the Home Rule agitation. Exquisitely sensitive to the intangibles that influenced a cultured mind, he was incapable of understanding those which swayed the imaginations of the rude and unlettered. He could appreciate to the full the coarseness of some conceptions of the Manchester

school; he could see the ultra-democrat's error in refusing a value to everything that cannot be weighed or counted; he was wholly alive to the importance of family tradition and the 'public school spirit.' But it never seems to have occurred to him that vulgar people, too, have their own imponderables. Thus he appears never to have seen anything in a strike but wrong-headedness and bad business; the loyalty of workman to workman, often as noble as that of soldier to soldier, was to him not merely incomprehensible but invisible. Similarly he could not understand the irrational affection of common men for the land of their birth. He himself might love Whittinghame, with its bleakness and winter snows, better than the fairest pleasance in Italy; but then he was Balfour of Whittinghame, and entitled to be above reason when he chose. But as to the Highland crofters, for example, why should they cling to a land which condemned them to 'contend with inclement skies, with stormy seas, and a barren soil' when emigration offered an easy solution of their problem? In Ireland, also, why should men so stupidly battle for the mean parcels of infertile land, offering the barest subsistence, while across the ocean there were great tracts of virgin soil crying for their labour? Here again, despite the enormous decrease in the Irish population since the beginning of the century, the only remedy in which he had real faith was emigration; the great work which he accomplished in the 'congested' districts ('congested' was an invention of Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, his euphemism for 'poverty-stricken') he only regarded in the light of a palliative. Above all he remained a contemptuous unbeliever in the genuineness of the cry of 'Ireland a nation.' Why should Ireland want to be a nation? It was as silly as Sussex trying

to return to Heptarchy times. To him the Home Rule member was either a coarse humbug or an uninteresting kind of fool. For Mr Parnell he had a certain respect; he was a gentleman in the heraldic sense and a very astute man, who was using a craze for his own purposes; his cynicism was at least some set-off to his eccentricity. The adroitness of Mr Tim Healy also aroused his admiration; Mr Balfour could not possibly be insensitive to genius, even though displayed at his own expense. 'How clever he is,' he said more than once, when waiting to reply to some specially bitter and vigorous attack. But for the ordinary Irish member, and especially for men like Mr Dillon and Mr O'Brien, his contempt was excessive; those whom he could not consider 'on the make' he viewed as fanatics of a rather low order.

The first work before the new Chief Secretary was the Crimes Bill, which, unlike any other previous measure of the kind, was of a permanent character, a weapon to remain always in the armoury of Dublin Castle, and to be taken out at the convenience of the Executive. It superseded trial by jury. It enabled the Lord-Lieutenant to declare unlawful any association he might happen to think dangerous. It gave the Resident Magistrates, many of whom were quite ignorant of any law beyond what might be gleaned from the 'Justice's Manual,' power to try cases which in the rest of the Kingdom must go before a judge and 'twelve good men and true.' A measure so unusual, and so inconsistent with the contention of Unionism that Great Britain and Ireland were one, naturally provoked strenuous resistance; the first reading was only passed by the guillotine closure, now used for the first time. Before the second reading *The Times* published the famous forged

letter purporting to show that Mr Parnell privately approved of the Phœnix Park murders at the very time when he was publicly expressing his abhorrence of the crime. Mr Parnell described the letter as a 'villainous and bare-faced forgery' which could deceive no one. But Mr Parnell was himself deceived; his denial was not believed, and the effect of the publication was to swell somewhat the Government majority on the second reading.

Mr Balfour had hardly shone in the earlier stages of the Bill. Indeed, on introducing it he narrowly escaped breaking down. Natural nervousness, no doubt, was part of the trouble; but in no part of his career has he excelled in formal expositions. Rarely did he show that grasp of a subject, that precise sense of the relation between principles and details, which made the set speeches of men like Peel and Gladstone models of Parliamentary form. Mr Balfour has always tended to over-elaboration of inessentials, and sometimes even of irrelevances; while he often neglected to lay with sufficient solidity the foundations of his argument. Throughout his life he has never begun a speech well; he fumbles and trips over himself until he has got into the subject; having got into it, he is apt to dwell too long on some points, and to dismiss others with undue brevity; 'thinking aloud' has something of the inconsequence of ordinary silent thinking. Mr Balfour is at his best in dealing with specific points as they arise; then the mobility of his intelligence counts like a French seventy-five. In the cut-and-thrust of Committee debate the agility of his mind and the quickness of his wit found their full opportunity. For the first time the House of Commons recognised that a new and incalculable force had appeared. Every weapon of the debater, from grave impressiveness

to stinging repartee, was brought to bear with the object, now of discrediting the Nationalists, now of embarrassing the Liberals, now of removing the lingering doubts of the Liberal Unionists. His boundless resource, his gay audacity, and his destructive irony roused the enthusiasm of his own party, his tact and caution softened any scruples of their allies, and the whole brilliant display extracted a reluctant admiration from the opposition. A comparatively unmarked man at the time of his appointment, Mr Balfour emerged from this ordeal on a level of unassailable superiority. 'He handled,' says Lord (then Mr John) Morley, 'the old sophisms of Irish coercion with a dauntless ingenuity that would have made a piquant diversion, if only the public difficulties had been less flagrant. . . . He even succeeded in diffusing a sort of charm over such topics as the squalid episodes of prison treatment and police excess of force.' His 'favourite weapon,' says the same observer, 'was the rapier, with no button on, without prejudice to a strong broadsword when it was wanted.' 'His eye for the construction of dilemmas was incomparable, and the adversary was rapidly transfixed with the necessity of extricating himself from two equally discreditable scrapes. To expose a single inch of unguarded surface was to provoke a dose of polished raillery that was new, effective, and unpleasant. He revelled in carrying logic all its length, and was not always above urging a weak point as if it were a strong one. Though polished and high-bred in air, he unceremoniously applied Dr Johnson's principle that to treat your adversary with respect is to give him an advantage to which he is not entitled. Of intellectual satire he was a master—when he took the trouble.'

Perhaps even more striking was the tribute of

the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which had only just recently been so dubious and critical. It now found itself (August, 1887) pretty sure that Mr Balfour would soon be leading his party in the House, and possibly even in the country. 'Mr Balfour,' it said, 'has risen and is still rising by being true to his convictions, and acting steadily on the lines of his party faith. There is not a man in the House who does not trust Mr Balfour, although there are many who are irritated against him. . . . He is now second only to Mr Goschen on the Ministerial Bench as a speaker, and he has displayed an industry and an adroitness in conducting his Bills through the House of which few believed him capable. He has courage, courtesy, consistency, and culture. If his life is spared and his natural indolence scourged out of him by the beneficent fates he will yet form in many respects an ideal leader for the Conservative Party.' Such tributes might be indefinitely multiplied. There are many examples of men made by a single speech. Mr Balfour's swiftly reared reputation rested on the more solid basis of a sustained display of the highest talent in the most difficult department of Parliamentary art.

CHAPTER V

The weapon of the Coercion Act forged—the Lords did their share, passing the Bill without the change of a word, in a few hours—Mr Balfour used it with uncompromising vigour. '*Surtout, point de zêle*' was the counsel of the French cynic. The exact opposite was the motto of Mr Balfour in inspiring his subordinates of the Irish Executive. Dublin Castle, the Resident Magistrates, and the Royal Irish Constabulary, were all told that Mr Balfour expected them to do their duty, and more rather than less. From all Parliamentary attacks he would defend them, if they might chance to overdo things; meanwhile under-doing things would not be tolerated. From the Lord-Lieutenant, the Marquess of Londonderry, and the Under-Secretary, Sir West Ridgway, down to the newest constable recruit, the whole Irish Executive was in tune; and the note was 'resolute government.' *Tel maître, tel valet.* It no sooner became known that severe efficiency was the passport to promotion than everything that was ambitious in Irish officialism and lawyerdom pressed forward hungrily for profitable employment. Among the aspirants was a young barrister, one Edward Carson, an ex-Liberal, who placed at the services of the Government the energy of a fanatic, the acuteness of a destructively powerful intellect, and the tongue of a terrible cross-examiner. For the moment he was content to be a servant and to take a servant's pay. The time was to come when he became something like the master of his master.

The police were soon shown that they might depend on Mr Balfour. At Michelstown an open-air meeting took place in the Autumn of 1887; the police, stupidly or wilfully attempting to push an official shorthand-writer through the crowd, were assailed with sticks; withdrawing to their barracks, they fired, killing one man and mortally wounding two others. In these later days, when two or three Michelstowns have taken place every month, it is difficult to understand the shock caused in Great Britain by these tactless proceedings, perhaps even not easy to sympathise adequately with the denunciation of the Irish Secretary. But though the public was sufficiently accustomed to Irish crime, it was as yet new to the details of 'resolute government,' and did not like the idea of firearms being used on a mob only armed with sticks. There was something coldly deliberate about the affair which gave an unpleasant impression. Mr Balfour, however, stood by his guns—or rather the rifles of the Royal Irish Constabulary. No inquiry was ever held; and the Chief Secretary maintained that the police were free not only from serious blame, but from all blame. To do him justice, he was no respecter of persons, and nameless people were not the only objects of severity. Mr William O'Brien, M.P., was treated as an ordinary pickpocket; so was Mr Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, an English literary man who resisted the police in dispersing a Home Rule meeting. 'Mr O'Brien's breeches' were one of the jokes of the day. His clothes were taken away; he refused to wear the prison garb; and he kept his bed for some days until a new suit mysteriously found its way into his cell. It was part of Mr Balfour's scheme to rob martyrdom of all poetry; trial and sentence took place in unspectacular conditions, and punishment

was deprived of no element of discomfort or degradation. The plank bed, the cropped hair, the menial task, the association with common criminals, were all insisted on; and Mr Balfour condemned as 'strange, maudlin, and effeminate,' the doctrine common to most civilised nations that political prisoners are entitled to special treatment. He even affected to hold that the motives of ordinary criminals were less ignoble than those of many political offenders. But the plan was seriously overdone; people on this side of the Channel, while approving of vindication of the law, continued to draw a distinction between political and other offences, and Mr O'Brien's breeches were not wholly a laughing matter. The more serious part of the electorate hardly saw why, in order to be resolute, one should be pettifogging. Mr O'Brien was not the only Member of Parliament to come within the widespread net of the Chief Secretary. Mr John Dillon was also sentenced to six months' imprisonment for participation in the plan of campaign; and at one time no fewer than six members of the Nationalist Party were simultaneously under sentence. Altogether twenty-two of Mr Parnell's followers suffered imprisonment.

In face of the inevitable storm which these severities produced in the House of Commons, Mr Balfour carefully conserved his energies. His administrative policy was conceived with a view to the utmost economy of exertion. He gave the Irish Executive its cue, and left details to its discretion—and even to its indiscretion. His Parliamentary system was equally framed to save himself from excessive strain. For a time he bore alone the brunt of passionate denunciation and rigorous questionings. When the pace became too hot he put up an unpaid Parliamentary Secretary to do work which no salary

could have compensated. It was the business of this luckless person, one Colonel King-Harman, to read the written replies of the Irish Secretary to the questions of the Nationalist members. His rising was regularly the signal for angry cries of 'Balfour, Balfour!' On Colonel King-Harman breath and ill-temper were wasted, and so it happened that when his chief condescended at last to enter the House he received a less interrupted if not a less hostile hearing. Apart from this method of showing his contemptuous unconcern for Irish Parliamentary opinion, Mr Balfour's attitude was at times almost studiously provocative. No doubt his pose of cool disdain was partly politic; taking his cue from Mr Parnell, he may have thought Irishmen best managed with gentlemanly hauteur. But temperament also was involved; like his uncle, he had a curious scorn for the 'Celtic fringe,' and hardly knew whether to dislike more its murderous excesses in Ireland or its emotional manifestations at Westminster. If Mr Balfour's intention was really to sting the Irish into infuriation, he certainly succeeded. There was something massively insulting in his calm. But it was only maintained by an effort. Mr Balfour, long afterwards, told Lord Morley that he seldom slept well after a rough Irish night. 'I never lose my temper,' he said, 'but one's nerves get on edge, and it takes time to cool.' Heat of any kind would certainly not have been suspected by his demeanour as he sprawled on the Treasury Bench, with closed eyes, his legs crossed in a curiously loose-jointed way: 'long and lanky; legs as erratic as Henry Irving's on the stage,' says a contemporary observer.

Whatever the motive, the course was, up to a point, justified by success. The Nationalists learned, by bitter experience, that there was no hustling or

'rattling' Mr Balfour; and to the rest of the House he so cleverly contrived, as a general rule, to present his case in the best light that the Liberal Unionists, who disliked coercion and were not at the time so closely attached to the Conservative Party as they afterwards became, could offer no real objection. With Liberal criticisms he dealt occasionally in terms of solemn reproof, but more often in the far more deadly spirit of lively banter. Mr Balfour had a really remarkable gift of making some considerable things—and some undeniably great men—look small. A few drops from his never-failing philtre of ironic wit, and the effect of the most eloquent denunciation was fatally impaired. He was equally effective in dealing with the fury of the Irish, the cudgel play of Sir William Harcourt, and the moral fervour of Mr John Morley.

For Mr Gladstone's unique position he showed no manner of respect; 'the right honourable gentleman,' he once said, 'was formerly as ready to blacken the Irish members' characters as he is now ready to blacken their boots.' It must be said that in the numerous contests between the two it was not the younger man who took less than he gave. At this time Mr Gladstone's intellect showed no appreciable signs of decay, and his eloquence was probably never purer or more weighty. But he did seem, in his absorption in the Irish question, to have lost some of his sense of perspective. To some obscure affray or an eviction scene in County Clare he would devote all the powers of invective he had brought to bear on atrocities which had devastated a Turkish province, and, by accepting as facts many stories of doubtful accuracy, he gave Mr Balfour opportunities, seldom missed, of stinging retort.

Thus Mr Balfour spoke at Birmingham in 1887

of Mr Gladstone's 'extraordinary and unblushing perversion of fact,' and declared that 'he attacks the police, he palliates crime, and he encourages lawlessness with the same glib dexterity as if he had been all his life a follower of Mr Parnell.' 'I cannot honestly say,' said Mr Balfour on another occasion, 'that I expected Mr Gladstone to retract the errors I pointed out in his speech. I am quite aware that the only way to make Mr Gladstone retract a misstatement is to send him a lawyer's letter.' The language was severe, though hardly severe enough to deserve Sir William Harcourt's description of it as 'violent,' 'brutal,' and 'outside the decencies of English public life.' But it did put a finger on the habit of the veteran leader at this time. Mr Gladstone condescended to the most trivial details, and often got his details wrong. A less calm and well-equipped opponent, of course, he might have overwhelmed by sheer weight of energy. But Mr Balfour, cool, sceptical, insensitive (except intellectually) to eloquence, exquisitely sensitive to the ridiculous, was precisely the man to deal with zeal untempered by discretion. His own views on enthusiasm may perhaps be appropriately quoted here. 'It is unfortunate, considering that enthusiasm moves the world,' he once wrote in a letter to a lady, 'that so few enthusiasts can be trusted to speak the truth.'

Coercion in pronounced form extended over some three years. Apart from abatement of the indignities noted above—a concession, it may be noted, made to people who happened to be not only political prisoners, but of some social importance—it was maintained with unflinching severity, and those offenders who appealed (as they were entitled to do) against the sentences of the Resident Magistrates found not infrequently that they fared worse at the

hands of the County Court judges, who (there seemed reason to believe) acted thus under the inspiration of Dublin Castle. At this time 'bloody Balfour' was most sincerely detested in Ireland. 'Do the Irish really hate me as much as their newspapers say?' asked the Irish Secretary of Father Healy. 'If,' was the reply, 'if only they hated the devil half as much, my occupation would be gone.' One effect of the reign of coercion was to bring about a close alliance between the Liberals and the Nationalists. For some time after the General Election it could not be forgotten that the woes of the Liberal Party were largely of Irish manufacture, and, while Mr Gladstone's authority sufficed to secure a formal approval of Home Rule as a principle, it could not so readily make British Liberals love the Irish Home Rulers individually. But the enmity of 1886 began to give way to sentiments engendered by constant co-operation. In the phrase of the day there was a 'union of hearts.' On Liberal platforms in every out-of-the-way part of England appeared effusive Irish members, with dreadful stories (illustrated by lantern slides) concerning their outraged and down-trodden country. The stock speech of the time was something as follows:—

'Ladies and gentlemen,—I am from Tipperary. Ye've heard of Tipperary. The name of Tipperary is synonymous with pluck, and courage, and dash, and daring, and bravery; and all Balfour's bayonets and all Balfour's bludgeons and all Balfour's battering-rams will never suffice to beat a single Tipperary man into submission. No, bludgeons will not do, nor battering-rams, nor all the British Army and Navy. But why not try a nobler way? Why not try a juster way? Why not try a more equitable, a more

merciful way? Why not try to do with kindness, with mercy, with justice, with equitable and honest treatment what ye can never do by force? Why not try it? Ye say ye can't take the risk? What is the risk? Try it, and if it doesn't succeed—why, we're a poor little island, and ye're a great strong Empire, and it's not a chance we'd have against ye.'

Of course, the interval was longer between the premises and the conclusions, but this summary fairly represents the argument. Mr Parnell, cold and stately, took no part in a political love-feast unsuited to his temperament, though he rather encouraged his followers, especially those who had seen the inside of a jail, to appear on Liberal platforms. His own views remained constant about all things English, and especially about all things Gladstonian. 'I think of Mr Gladstone and the English people,' he said once, 'what I have always thought of them. They will do what we make them do.' Yet he was not above simulating in public what he never felt in private; and, when the moment seemed appropriate for a formal alliance, he called on his followers, at Liverpool in 1889, to rally round the 'grand old leader.'

It is not necessary here to trace in detail the events which first raised this remarkable man to popularity, and then consigned him to complete ruin. But, as the fall of Mr Parnell did more than all Mr Balfour's measures to break up the solidarity of Irish resistance, the story cannot be wholly omitted in a sketch of Mr Balfour's career. The 'Parnell Letter' published by *The Times* has already been mentioned. In the course of a libel action brought against the newspaper in 1888 by a former follower of Mr Parnell, other letters were read by Sir Richard Webster, the Attorney-General, who appeared for *The Times*. They were

alleged to have been written while Mr Parnell was in Kilmainham Jail; one called for 'prompt action' to 'make it hot for old Forster and Co.', while in another it was explained that Parnell was bound to condemn the Phœnix murders in Parliament, though the inference was that he approved of them. The other letters were trivial, and would have been unimportant but for the fact that a certain word was misspelt. Mr Parnell demanded the appointment of a Select Committee to inquire into the charges; the Government conceded instead a Royal Commission of Judges charged, not only with the investigation of this particular matter, but with the consideration of Irish affairs in general. The Commission sat for over a year. In the end the letters were proved to have been forged by Mr Richard Pigott, who had been employed by the Secretary of the Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union to collect evidence connecting the Parnellite movement with crime. The Secretary conveyed the letters to *The Times*, which published them as genuine, without taking more than the most perfunctory steps to establish their authenticity. The Commissioners, of course, condemned the publication of the letters. Mr Parnell was acquitted of various personal charges made against him; but other questions were left much as they were. The Judges pronounced, what every sensible man knew already, that Parnell and his associates 'did not denounce the system which led to crime and outrage, but persisted in it with knowledge of its effect.'

On the main charges, therefore, the findings of the Commission did not exonerate Mr Parnell. But the affair of the letters was the dramatically interesting thing, and exposure of the methods used to ruin Mr Parnell, in the sense of exhibiting him as a person no decent man could shake hands with, naturally

served to range on his side the British love of fair play. The rather ungenerous attitude of the Government increased this tendency, and (of course quite illogically) there was a considerable revulsion of popular feeling with regard not only to Mr Parnell but to the larger questions of Irish policy. Mr Balfour had comparatively little to say regarding the Commission; he avoided the mistake of Lord Salisbury, whose cynical references to the forgery did a good deal of harm to the Government among people who, while no apologists of Parnellism, were still less enamoured of Pigottism.

But Mr Balfour had accumulated not a little unpopularity in his own peculiar sphere of action. For some time symptoms of dissatisfaction with coercion had been apparent; now it looked as if the country, tired of standing on its rigid Cromwellian leg, was anxious to change to the more flexible member. Even on the Unionist side a murmur began to be heard; by-elections were being lost; it was asked whether coercion really paid. A North of England Conservative member condemned as 'inexpedient from a party point of view' the treatment of Irishmen and the 'straining and stretching of the law' by the Resident Magistrates; English law, he said, was being made unpopular in Ireland, and its leaders were being provoked by 'illegal and unconstitutional acts.' Lord Randolph Churchill declared that he did not like the imprisonment of Irish members 'in such numbers'; justice and injustice, decency and indecency, seemed in his view to be a question largely of arithmetic. Even the Irish Unionist papers murmured that the Government would act just as it was doing if it wished to make the coercive system appear odious.

Mr Balfour, ever gaily confident against the

enemy but always sensitive to criticism within his own camp, for the first time seemed a little unsure of himself. While in this mood he made a rather serious mistake, a mistake of the kind common to clever men who feel they are in the right and are irritated by a general suspicion that they are in the wrong. Unable to draw back without stultifying himself, he acted with more than his usual vigour and less than his customary judgment. He arrested Mr John Dillon and Mr William O'Brien for making speeches at Tipperary, where the tenants of Mr Smith-Barry had refused to pay rent as a protest against that landlord's support of evictions elsewhere. Left to itself the 'New Tipperary' scheme—the erection by public subscription of shanties to accommodate the evicted—would have evaporated in ridicule. The thing was a failure, and, but for Mr Balfour's intervention, the failure would have been ignominious. But the arrests made heroes of two members of Parliament. They were remanded on bail, and before the Court again met they had left, as they had intended to do before arrest, for the United States. Mr Balfour looked just a little silly, and that was the very worst thing that could happen. Indeed the whole affair savoured of overdoing it, and a Liberal by-election victory emphasised the fact that the British voter, really tired of arrests, 'shadowings,' evictions, and the rest, was apprehensive that the whole dreary routine was to begin over again.

From any evil consequences of over-zeal, however, Mr Balfour was saved by the O'Shea divorce suit. The decree *nisi*, with costs against Mr Parnell, changed the whole face of Irish—and English—politics. The union of hearts was rudely destroyed. Mr Gladstone broke with Parnell; the Irish Party

split into two bitterly hostile sections; Mr John Redmond, the nominal successor of Parnell (who survived his fall less than a year), came under the ban of the priests; Mr Justin M'Carthy, leader of the other faction, had the disadvantage (in English and Protestant eyes) of seeming to possess their blessing. The whole fabric of Nationalism was wrecked as by an earthquake; Liberalism was to some extent compromised, and profoundly discouraged.

Captain O'Shea, in asserting his rights as an aggrieved husband, had broken many things. But he secured Mr Balfour, at the very moment his fame seemed to be on the decline, freedom to win another and perhaps higher Irish reputation than that which he had attained as the agent of 'resolute government.'

CHAPTER VI

So far the drudgery of repression had prevented Mr Balfour from proceeding with that policy of material betterment which was the complement of his 'Cromwellian' severity. But the matter had been much in his thoughts, and by 1889 practical expression had been given to one of his main ideas, that of improving communications. Many parts of Ireland suffered from an isolation little less complete than could have existed in the darkest ages. There might be plenty in one village, and starvation in another a league or two away, but the absence of any direct means of communication prevented the superfluity of the one relieving the deficiency of the other. The scheme embodied in the Light Railways Act of 1889 was destined to bring about a substantial improvement in the transport conditions of the rural districts, and, as Irish labour was employed on the construction works, this measure brought more than prospective benefit; it exercised an immediate and important influence in relieving present distress.

In the autumn of 1890, in order to obtain first-hand knowledge to guide him in this and his other schemes, Mr Balfour took advantage of the break-up of Parnellism to make a tour of the 'congested' districts. The experiment had its moral as well as its material value. When the Irish cottar is not a monster, he is a natural gentleman; it is a peculiarity of the country that most peasants have the manners of peers, if some peers have those of peasants.

Mr Balfour received, on the whole, most favoured individual treatment; he reciprocated with a frankness and a cordiality hardly to be expected of his rather cold and reserved nature; and the result was a distinct improvement in feeling on both sides. Mr Balfour returned from Ireland with a rather more sympathetic understanding of the human problem, while on their side the Irish peasants found the real man quite unlike the traditionary ogre. The party consisted of Mr Balfour, Miss Balfour, the Under-Secretary, Sir West Ridgway, and two private secretaries, of whom one was that great gentleman afterwards so honourably associated with the Irish Office, Mr George Wyndham, M.P. The tour through Mayo and Galway sufficiently illustrated the inconvenience of the primitive conditions Mr Balfour had fixed on as one of the chief causes of Irish distress. The weather was shocking; the roads were vile; it was often necessary to go on foot for long distances. At Belmullett the Irish Secretary was visited by the 'king' of Inniska Island, who told him that the islanders' only boat had been smashed; Miss Balfour promised to replace it, and for her kindness received the prayers and the blessings of his majesty. On Achill Island, a visit was paid to the hamlet of Doolga, a collection of mud-huts all huddled together without any attempt to form streets. Here Mr Balfour undertook to finish at his own expense a bridge (begun and left incompleted) which was designed to connect two districts divided by a swamp. Nowhere was rudeness shown, despite the fact that the Nationalist press had prophesied a 'fitting reception for the chief coercionist.' Many priests went out of their way to express in the warmest terms their gratitude for Mr Balfour's interest in their parishioners; and in a speech delivered on his

return to England the Secretary acknowledged in cordial terms their friendly attitude.

'I did not go,' he said, 'with any political object. I went with the distinct purpose of seeing the distress where distress was said to prevail . . . and of forming in my own mind the best scheme I could for meeting the difficulties which presented themselves. That was the spirit in which I went, and that was the spirit in which I was received. There were people—and I speak not merely of the people, but of those who are largely the leaders of the people, I mean the priests—who spoke to me as rational men, about a difficulty in which both were equally and vitally concerned. They met me with perfect good taste; they met me with the utmost frankness; they never concealed their own opinions any more than I concealed mine. They met me with a courtesy, a kindness, and a business spirit which I will not thank them for, because I am sure it was natural to them, which I am sure that any man who had the good of the people at heart would have felt; but they met me in a spirit very different from the Dublin politicians. Few things in my experience as Irish Secretary—and I can assure you it has been a very entertaining one—few things have entertained me more than the shriek of fury and indignation of the Nationalist press, and the Nationalist members set up when they found I was travelling in Galway, Mayo, and Donegal.' Mr Balfour had in mind, no doubt, speeches like that of Mr W. Redmond, who stigmatised the tour as 'one of the meanest of Mr Balfour's acts,' since 'he dare not face the men of Mayo without his sister, for they knew that, no matter in what light they regarded him, they would not do anything discourteous to a lady.'

In Donegal there was only one hostile demonstration, at a place called Dungloe, where Mr Swift MacNeill, M.P., attacked Mr Balfour on the subject of evictions. The Secretary was receiving a deputation at the time, and Mr MacNeill's intrusion was described by a Mr James Sweeney as a 'bit of impertinence.' A heated colloquy followed, and the upshot of it was that Mr Sweeney had to drive fourteen miles to Gweedore in order to telegraph to the press a withdrawal of this piece of *lèse-majesté*, a trusty Nationalist accompanying, 'lest he should change his mind on the way.' Mr Balfour's account of this little comedy is so entertaining in itself, and so typical of his bantering style, that it may be well to give it in full:—

'Perhaps the most amusing episode of the whole tour was one which you may have seen some account of at Dungloe. Dungloe is a small town in the North-west of Donegal, and thither a certain Mr Swift MacNeill, a member for one of the Divisions of Donegal, betook himself in frantic haste, in order to screw up what I think in a letter to me he described as the natural politeness of the Irish race to the particular pitch agreeable to the Irish Nationalist member. Well, Mr MacNeill came to the very small meeting which I held in Dungloe, where the wants of the district were being discussed in a very sober and businesslike spirit, and he made me a long speech about evictions and about battering-rams and about something Mr Gladstone said to me and something I had said to Mr Gladstone and a great deal Mr Swift MacNeill had said to both of us, but which I am afraid has probably escaped the memory of Mr Gladstone as much as it has mine. The upshot of his address was that if I regarded him as the

spokesman of the popular sentiment in the locality I should be forced to the conviction that I ought to care very much more about Mr Swift MacNeill's speeches in Parliament than about any railway or public work in his district and that therefore the meeting had better break up. Well? What happened then? There is a gentleman living in the neighbourhood, a certain Mr Sweeney. I believe him to be a considerable tradesman in these parts. He got up and described Mr MacNeill as being impertinent; and very plainly indicated that I was not to take Mr Swift MacNeill as representing the locality, that he knew more about it, and that he not only differed from Mr Swift MacNeill but that he was prepared to express these differences in very concise and appropriate language. Well, but what happened? Mr Sweeney was compelled that night, one of the rainiest I ever recollect, to drive fourteen miles in a pouring rain to Gweedore, and I presume fourteen miles back in a pouring rain and a rising hurricane, for the sole purpose of withdrawing this extremely appropriate epithet, which in a moment of undue rhetorical expansion he had applied to Mr Swift MacNeill. . . .

'Now, gentlemen, who is Mr Sweeney? I will tell you. If any man could claim to belong to the Nationalist party I should have assuredly thought that it would have been Mr Sweeney. He was imprisoned under the Crimes Act for a week, I think—no, a fortnight—because he declined to give evidence in a very bad boycotting case that occurred at Dungloe. He is not only a Nationalist, but he is a Nationalist of the most pronounced type. He is a man who, on the very occasion that this meeting at Dungloe took place, presented me with an address which is worth anybody's perusal—but

I do not read it aloud—in which he talked of Pigott and about Hottentots, and in which he quoted Diogenes, and Mr Froude. I do not wish, heaven forbid, to destroy any budding literary reputation. But when I consider the refined style and ripe scholarship exhibited by this document I cannot help recognising in it the hand of my friend Mr Swift MacNeill. However that may be, whoever may have been the veritable author of this literary gem, it was at all events presented to me by Mr Sweeney, and I should have thought that this incident, combined with his imprisonment, combined with his avowed support of boycotters and known extreme opinions, would have saved him from the kind of attack he has met with in the Nationalist press, because in one rash moment he gave out his veritable convictions.'

The more serious impressions left by the tour may be gathered from other passages in the same speech, delivered at Liverpool on November 19. The population of the 'congested districts,' Mr Balfour said, were not congested in the sense of being crowded, but 'congested in not being able to draw from their holdings a safe and sufficient livelihood for themselves and their children. . . . The people have not the habit of continuous, almost painful industry, which some small holders in other countries show. Their system of agriculture is a wretched one; their fishing, compared with Scotch or Manx, is wretched. They have not got the boats, nor the knowledge, nor the seamanship. . . . The peasant of the congested districts is either a fisherman, a labourer, or a farmer, and I say that, if you are to raise him from the condition in which he is at this moment, you must make him a better farmer, or a

better fisherman, or a better labourer.' The task was one, not of expenditure, but of changing largely the habits of the people; if all co-operated, and the people themselves could be got to see wherein the solution consisted, the problem was sure of solution, though the process must be slow.

In an interview given a little earlier to a representative of the *New York World*, Mr Balfour said:—

'There is no way, so far as I can see, for curing this periodical distress (through the failure of the potato crop) except by enlarging the holdings of tenants in the congested districts and by the spending of money on public improvements which would be a lasting benefit to the country. I suppose it is an unpopular thing to say, but I will not conceal my personal opinion that emigration must play a prominent part in relieving the congested districts of Ireland. The policy for the future must be either migration or emigration. I do not think that migration will mend matters very much, for these poor people must eventually find homes in the New World, in Australia, or in Africa.'

The following year, 1891, saw the legislative fruit of much hard thinking. The Irish Land Purchase Bill of that year was a measure very different from the small Land Act the passage of which was almost simultaneous with that of the Crimes Act in 1887. It provided for the issue of £23,000,000 of stock by the Imperial Government for the purpose of enabling Irish tenants to purchase their holdings from landlords who were willing to part with their property. As to the merits of this measure, Irish Nationalist testimony, as being most critical, is also most valuable. Mr Parnell, who

gave it a blessing which, if diminished in value by his changed circumstances, was still important, declared that it would do two things: 'It will enormously benefit the Irish tenant-farmers and it will greatly benefit the Irish labourers. . . . It will enable about 200,000 of the 520,000 Irish tenant-farmers to become owners of their holdings at a reduction of about 40 per cent. That is to say, a man who now pays £50 a year will get his holding for less than £30 a year, and others in proportion; and at the end of forty-nine years his holding will be his. . . . It will give the Irish labourer, for the purpose of building houses and fencing in small plots of land, the sum of £115,000 a year in perpetuity.' Mr John Redmond described the Act as a 'great measure,' and its passage was eased by a quite new atmosphere of mutual accommodation. The skill with which Mr Balfour managed the passage of the Bill through Committee was not inferior to that he displayed in piloting the Crimes Bill, and, if he did not increase his already high reputation for Parliamentary adroitness and perception, his fame as a constructive statesman was notably enhanced.

The Act brought into being the Congested Districts Board, which has been perhaps the most conspicuously successful experiment in the way of getting Irishmen to co-operate, without distinction of party or creed, for the welfare of their country as a whole. A sum of a million and a half sterling, taken from the Irish Church Fund, was placed at the disposal of the Board, which was allowed a wide discretion as regards schemes for the alleviation of distress, the improvement of housing and other conditions, the encouragement of new industries, and the development of old. After months of patient investigation the Board issued a report which at

once shocked and stimulated. It threw light on a mass of misery, ignorance, squalor, and helplessness concerning which the more prosperous parts of the Kingdom, and even of Ireland itself, had remained in complacent nescience. It was found that great natural potentialities of wealth existed in close association with the direst actual poverty. The splendid fisheries especially were neglected; the Board, providing proper boats, gear, and instruction, showed how the riches of the sea could be translated into terms of comparative luxury and comfort for a considerable population. Thus in one Donegal district in 1888 the catch of fish could usually be sent to market in a single cart; ten years later a steamer conveyed full cargoes daily to Glasgow during the season.

The fishery problem was simply one of capital and instruction. It was far otherwise with agriculture. In large areas every element of prosperity was wanting. There were no residents of education to act as natural leaders of the people; the tenants, wholly lacking capital, lived from hand to mouth in physical squalor and dense ignorance; with no money to clean the land, or even to buy good seed or decent stock, they could hardly be blamed for the imperfection and inefficiency of their methods. In these circumstances the Congested Districts Board had a heart-breaking task. The results of steady effort, however, were far from contemptible; the breed of cattle was improved by the importation of first-class stock; instruction was given in scientific farming; public works were undertaken with the object of correcting natural disadvantages. Cottage industries, such as spinning, weaving, and carpet-making, were also systematically taught; and after a few years Mr Balfour could with justice claim that the Congested

Districts Board had at least shown the lines upon which a solution of the problem might ultimately be found. In this view he was supported by some of his bitterest political enemies. Leading members of the Nationalist party, critical in all else, like Mr Davitt and Mr Dillon, freely acknowledged the great work accomplished by the machinery set up in 1891.

At one of the meetings of the Congested Districts Board a notable critic had an opportunity of observing the methods of the Irish Secretary. 'He struck me,' says Lord Morley, 'by his firm, close business tone. Every word showed a hard grip of the subject in hand. Full of charm and play in ordinary converse, in business he is absolutely without atmosphere, just as Chamberlain was.' This want of 'atmosphere,' so desirable in hard business, was unfortunately not confined within its appropriate limits. In Irish affairs in general Mr Balfour wanted that wide sympathy which afterwards inspired Mr George Wyndham. With it he might have succeeded as mightily as Mr Wyndham, through no fault of his own, failed tragically in attempting to settle the Irish question. Lacking it, though he planted the seeds of a new Irish prosperity, he did nothing to eradicate ancient hatreds. Manured with gold, the tares still sprang up even more luxuriantly than the wheat, and in our day a richer Ireland with more passion than the impoverished Ireland of Parnell prefers demands that Parnell would have deemed extravagant.

CHAPTER VII

A FEW hours before, to quote the words of Lord Morley, the 'Veiled shadow stole upon the scene,' and the stormy career of Charles Stewart Parnell became only a memory, the same relentless visitor had called on a very different household. Mr W. H. Smith, of the Front Bench and the railway bookstalls, Lord Randolph Churchill's 'lord of suburban pineries and vineries,' and a partner in the 'Marshall and Snelgrove of debate,' died on October 6, 1891, after leading the House of Commons in blameless fashion for five years.

Two statesmen of mature age and large experience had claims to the great post thus rendered vacant. Mr Goschen, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, was by all rule heir presumptive. Once a Liberal, he had long been rather remarkable for his Conservatism, but still he was of the City, and the Tory Party was yet essentially that of the land and the Church. On the other hand, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, of old county family and distinguished administrative record, was a most admirable representative of businesslike squirearchy. It might have been difficult to adjudicate between the two; Lord Salisbury avoided any such embarrassment by appointing his nephew, and the possible rivals competed only in welcoming Mr Balfour as Mr Smith's successor.

'It is absurd,' said *The Times*, in commenting on the appointment, 'to talk of nepotism when it is notorious that Lord Salisbury could no more lift his nephew above the heads of other men if the claims of Mr Balfour had not been supported by an

overwhelming body of Unionist opinion, than Mr Gladstone could or would have made either of his sons his Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1869 or 1880.' The cumbrous statement of a truth does not render it less true. In the four and a half years which had elapsed since he accepted the Irish Secretaryship Mr Balfour had made himself by far the most interesting figure on the Conservative side, and there was as yet no possibility of rivalry on the part of Mr Chamberlain. He was respected on all sides, and liked by those who did not dislike him very much, for his temper, though quick on occasion, was on the whole conciliatory; his manners were generally urbane and often charming; and, if he sometimes treated opposition with excessive disdain, he was free from the two faults the House of Commons never forgives: he neither fatigued nor hectored. To some extent also he had been mellowed by responsibility, and the shrillness and flippancy of the earlier Irish days were now less marked.

It was, therefore, with approval that one Cecil led the Commons while another led the Lords, and, though nobody would have believed Lord Salisbury incapable of nepotism, there was no disposition to suggest that on this occasion affectionate partiality had erred. It cannot be said, however, that Mr Balfour's first serious essay in leadership was a success. The remarkable Irish Local Government Bill, which Mr Balfour himself introduced (his place as Irish Secretary had been filled by an inconspicuous Mr Jackson who afterwards found a new obscurity as Lord Allerton), passed its second reading in February, 1892, by a majority of ninety-two. The Commons passed it, as the Commons passes so many things. in a state of mind almost equally compounded of indifference and bewilderment: indifference because

it was known that the Bill was intended only as election window-dressing, bewilderment because it was really something 'no fellow could understand.' Mr Balfour, in defence of one feature, said he had borrowed it from the procedure for the election of School Boards. 'I think,' he said with disarming frankness, 'that there are great advantages in doing a stupid thing that has been done before, rather than a wise thing which has not yet been done.' But on reflection Mr Balfour did not seem very proud of his handiwork (or Mr Jackson's ?), and his want of enthusiasm was infectious; the Bill died a natural death, and Mr Balfour would probably be unable to-day to say exactly what it purported to do. A Small Holdings Bill, of the character known as 'permissive'—'you needn't do it unless you like'—was carried through as a rather more likely attraction for the General Election, and Parliament was dissolved on June 26, 1892.

There could be but one issue, and Mr Balfour, in his election address, dealt almost entirely with Home Rule, though (the hand was the hand of Mr Chamberlain) he threw in a promise—never to be fulfilled by a Unionist Government—of old age pensions. It was not, however, the dulcet voice of the Unionist leader, but a more strident accent, that determined the character of the election. Already Ulster had spoken. 'We will not have Home Rule,' said the Duke of Abercorn, and the answering cheer of 12,000 Protestant delegates at Belfast carried across the Channel. The voice of Ulster had probably more effect in Great Britain than in 1886. For the point of the jingle that 'Home Rule means Rome Rule' had been sharpened by the fall of Parnell, who had gone down before the ban of the Roman Catholic Church; and the recent illustration of the

immense power of the Irish priesthood must have impressed many thousands of British Nonconformists who ordinarily owed allegiance to the Liberal party. As if this inevitable but most serious difficulty were not enough, Mr Gladstone had heavily handicapped himself by two of his own making. He had declared, equally against reason and against popular feeling, for the British evacuation of Egypt, and he had bound himself to the fantastic list of projects known as the Newcastle programme. The two strongest interests, established religion and the drink trade, were antagonised, the one by the proposals for the disestablishment of the Scottish Church and the Church in Wales, and the other by the plan for a local veto on the sale of liquor. Nearly every clergyman was thus converted, whether he wished or not, into a Conservative agent, and every taproom became a Conservative committee-room.

Mr Balfour by a majority of 398 retained his seat at Manchester against the attack of Professor Munro, and had the satisfaction of seeing the Conservative hold on that great city maintained. But this satisfaction was strictly personal. There has perhaps never been a general election more profoundly ungratifying to all parties. The Unionists could hardly rejoice over defeat; the Liberals might well regard such a victory as worse than defeat. We know from Lord Morley the gloom in Gladstonian councils when it was apparent that a majority of forty (including the Home Rule vote, Parnellite as well as anti-Parnellite) was the instrument vouchsafed for so mighty a task as lay before Mr Gladstone in his fourth administration. The plight of the Liberals was indeed pathetic. Their leader was eighty-three, and, although a miracle of intellectual and bodily vigour for that age, was beginning to lose sight and hearing so rapidly that

he might be compelled almost any day to retire from office. They were at the mercy of the Irish vote, of which nearly a fourth might almost be called hostile. The verdict of England, the verdict of Great Britain, was heavily against them; the great towns were unfavourable; it was certain that the House of Lords would reject the Home Rule Bill, it was certain that they would be justified in doing so, and nearly certain that an election following such rejection would end in total Liberal discomfiture. Only an overpowering sense of the sacredness and importance of the cause, together with the utmost loyalty in their following, could have heartened men faced with so hopeless and futile a task. But there was little common purpose in the party, whether in its inner councils or in the country. Mr Gladstone, at heart, cared as little for the Newcastle programme as did Lord Salisbury. The Newcastle devotees, on the other hand, cared little for Home Rule, were only sentimentally attached to Mr Gladstone, and were violently hostile to Lord Rosebery.

Well might Mr Balfour, when Parliament met on August 4, 'beam on his applauding friends' and 'look much more certain of approaching victory than conscious of pending defeat.' The Government, with propriety, declined to resign until turned out; it commanded the largest party in the House, and was entitled to await the test of a vote; it was, indeed, quite an open question how the majority would act. The vote of censure which was to decide the Government's fate was entrusted to Mr Asquith, a young member, who had but two years before taken silk, but whose great abilities had already attracted the notice of Mr Gladstone, and who was shortly to be Home Secretary in the Liberal Government. The resolution stated simply that the Government did

not possess the confidence of the House of Commons and of the country. The debate began on August 8; the following evening Mr Balfour, in his last speech as opposition leader, replied to Mr Asquith and Mr Gladstone. He justified the Government's retention of office on the ground that they had the right to know the terms of the Irish alliance; he remarked that the Unionists, in defeat, were sustained by hope and confidence, and that the Liberals, in victory, had before them only dismay and perplexity. After ridiculing the Newcastle programme, he predicted that the Unionist party before long would be called on to carry out their own measures of social reform.

The figures of the largest division ever known showed that paper estimates represented realities; the majority against the Government was exactly forty. The division was taken just before midnight. Mr Balfour wished to muster full strength, and Mr Chaplin, amid incessant cries of ' 'vide, 'vide,' remained speaking in order to enable three stragglers to get to the House. Nobody, since the death of the lamented Mr Biggar, was fitter for the charge; there was no stopping Mr Chaplin before the end of a sentence, and his sentences were as long as most men's speeches. On this occasion, while the feverish House chafed with impatience, he ambled with heavy-footed majesty down those corridors of beaten syntax in which he delighted to lose himself. At the end of twenty minutes, says Sir Henry Lucy, one of the strays was signalled; another twenty minutes, and the second arrived. Then, at ten minutes to twelve, Mr Balfour whispered to the Minister of Agriculture: 'That will do, Chaplin.' The last man had arrived.

A few minutes later Mr Balfour's first leadership of the House of Commons was at an end. It had

been too short to decide much. In dignity, tact, and technical mastery Mr Balfour had shown himself not deficient; it was yet to be proved whether he was equal to the extremest demands which the position might make upon him. But the general impression was favourable; and Mr Balfour at this time seemed destined, after a short experience of opposition, to resume power in circumstances of strength and security denied to the greatest of his predecessors.

CHAPTER VIII

The panegyrist of Mr Gladstone has exhausted the vocabulary of admiration over the veteran statesman's conduct of the Second Home Rule Bill. 'If he had been fifty his performances would have been astonishing; at eighty-four they were indeed a marvel. He made speeches of powerful argument, of high constitutional reasoning, of trenchant debating force. No emergency arose for which he was not ready, no demand that his versatility was not adequate to meet. His energy never flagged. When the Bill came on, he would put on his glasses, pick up the paper of amendments, and, running through them like lightning, would say, "of course, that's absurd —that will never do—we can never accept that—is there any harm in this?"' 'These rapid splendours of his,' adds Lord Morley, 'had their perils. I pointed out to him the pretty obvious drawbacks of settling delicate questions as we went along with no chance of sounding the Irishmen, and asked him to spare me quarter of an hour before luncheon, when the draftsmen and I, having thrashed out the amendments of the day, could put the bare points for his consideration. He was horrified at the very thought. "Out of the question. Do you want to kill me? I must have the whole of the morning for general Government business. Don't ask me."'

This extract suggests powerfully the pathos of the position of the indomitable personage whom Lord Randolph Churchill had rather brutally described six years before as an 'old man in a hurry.' Precisely because he was an old, a very old, man, Mr Gladstone

was bound to be in a hurry; he was fighting a more relentless opposition than that on the left hand of the Speaker. The thing must be done quickly if it were to be done at all, and every minute was of importance. There is nothing more wonderful in the Parliamentary history of Great Britain than the last fight of Mr Gladstone. There is also, perhaps, nothing sadder.

Mr Gladstone at eighty-four was fighting against time; Mr Balfour, at forty-four, was fighting for it. This was the essence of the Home Rule debate of 1893. Every hour lost to the old man was a victory for his opponent. Mr Balfour had a strong argumentative case; if the speech in which Mr Gladstone introduced the Bill was a model of stately and compelling eloquence, the opposition leader's reply was, in its kind, not less powerful. The constituencies had provided him with an easy answer to the question —was the Bill demanded? For the rest, said Mr Balfour, Mr Gladstone rested his case in 1886 on the absence of social order in Ireland: there was no alternative to Home Rule but perpetual coercion. But that dilemma was now seen to be no dilemma at all; Ireland was quiet without Home Rule and without coercion. On the detailed provisions of the Bill he dwelt with scorn; this 'strange abortion of a measure' attempted an impossible task, and reversed the process of evolution by which all great Empires have been built up and maintained. 'Much,' he concluded, 'as we have suffered in the past from vacillation, we at all events will put an end to this project, absolutely impossible of execution in its details, and even worse in its general principles, by which the right honourable gentleman, under the cloak and guise of drawing into closer harmony the different parts of the United Kingdom, is going to

frame institutions which must tend, ever and ever, as time goes on, to separate us both in temper and mind, and ultimately in nationality.'

But though there was no lack of argumentative power to back the case against Home Rule the main weapon was still obstruction. Mr Balfour in Committee announced cheerfully that he should vote for any amendment which would improve the Bill and any that would destroy it; a member of his party, still more thorough-going, voted against his conviction for a certain motion because it 'would make the Bill more detestable.' By the end of June, so little progress had been made that the Prime Minister was driven to the use of a time-limit, soon known as 'the gag.' The irritation caused by this curtailment of debate came to a head on July 27, the last night of the Committee stage. Mr Chamberlain wound up a bitter speech by comparing Mr Gladstone's followers to the flatterers of Herod, who cried, 'It is the voice of a god and not of a man.' 'Judas,' shouted an Irish member, who probably remembered with equal vividness the unpleasant fate of Herod and the 'ransom' days of Mr Chamberlain. The succeeding tumult degenerated into something like a free fight, and the Chairman had to send for the Speaker; after the sitting several sets of false teeth were found by the cleaners. Unpleasant as it was, the incident somewhat cleared the atmosphere, and the remaining stages of the Bill, the third reading of which was carried on September 1st by a majority of thirty-four, were marked by comparative calm. In the House of Lords, the measure was rejected by more than ten to one. Less than six months later Mr Gladstone had left the Government, and turned his back for the last time on the House of Commons. Patient youth had conquered impatient old age.

Mr Balfour's delaying tactics were not less justifiable than skilful; a Chamber which will tolerate them is presumably a Chamber in which there is no such measure of unanimity as should be behind a fundamental (or at least a most important) change in the Constitution. When, as in this case, the verdict of the constituencies is feeble and ambiguous, the case for fighting by every available constitutional means is greatly strengthened. Mr Balfour was on firm ground when, on the last stage of the Bill, he declared that 'until England and Scotland, the great contracting parties with Ireland in the Act of Union, are satisfied that the dissolution of that Union is for their best interests, that dissolution can never take place.' He was on much more debatable territory when, at the great Ulster demonstration on April 5, 1893, he used language which could hardly be interpreted as other than an endorsement of the Churchillian doctrine that Ulster would be right in fighting (unfiguratively) against Home Rule.

'You have had,' he said, 'to fight for your liberties before. I pray God you may never have to fight for them again. I do not believe you ever will have to fight for them. I admit the tyranny of the majority may be as bad as the tyranny of kings; and that the stupidity of a majority may be even greater than that of kings; and I will not say, and I do not think that any rational or sober men will say, that what is justifiable against a tyrannical king may not under certain circumstances be justifiable against a tyrannical majority. I hope and believe that this is but the utterance of a mere abstract proposition, and that circumstances which would justify such a state of things may never arise in this country.' Sir Edward Carson may have said worse things before; Sir Edward Carson has certainly said much worse

things since. But then Mr Balfour was not Sir Edward Carson; he was a great Minister, likely to be an even greater; and this imprudent (and most unnecessary) half-justification of possible rebellion was unworthy of his fame and position.

During the Home Rule debates, while relentless in his opposition, Mr Balfour affected towards Mr Gladstone personally a certain admiring consideration which sat gracefully on him, and presented a pleasant contrast to the rather supercilious tone he had adopted earlier in the Irish controversy. When he entered a remonstrance against the 'gag' he gently rebuked the Prime Minister as the arch-obstructionist. It is not a nice thing to charge a very old and distinguished gentleman with prolixity, but Mr Balfour's politeness on this occasion diminished the sting, while it did not lessen the point, of his very just accusation. It was pleasant also to hear him, with quite unaffected sincerity, congratulate Mr Gladstone on attaining his eighty-fourth birthday. 'Before putting a question,' he said, 'perhaps the right honourable gentleman will allow me, on my own part and on that of my friends, to offer him our most sincere congratulations.' 'Allow me to thank him,' said Mr Gladstone, his voice trembling with genuine pleasure, 'for his great courtesy and kindness.' Despite the many battles between the two, Mr Gladstone preserved to the last his grandfatherly attitude to the man whom he had distinguished, when much younger, as *capax imperii*; and Mr Balfour on his side could hardly be insensible to Mr Gladstone's personal charm, even though he was altogether unaffected by the witchery of his eloquence. The two men were, indeed, united by a number of ties, collectively not slight. Mr Gladstone had been on friendly terms with Mr Balfour's father;

they met frequently on neutral ground, and occasionally Mr Balfour spent a few days at Hawarden. If sometimes the younger man treated the elder with a severity a little ungraceful, he was quick to heal any obvious wound by a word of apology. 'Mr Gladstone is the last person in the House whose feelings I should desire to hurt,' he explained when his attention was called to a remark which was open to misconstruction. Mr Balfour's memorable tribute to Mr Gladstone as 'the greatest member of the greatest deliberative assembly the world has seen' may be conveniently quoted here:—

'He added a dignity, and he added a weight, to the deliberations of this House by his genius, which I think it is impossible adequately to replace. . . . He brought to our debates a genius which compelled attention, he raised in the public estimate the whole level of our proceedings, and they will be most ready to admit the infinite value of his service who realise how much of public prosperity is involved in the maintenance of the worth of public life, and how peculiarly difficult most democracies apparently feel it to be to avoid the opposite dangers into which so many of them have fallen.'

The last Parliamentary utterance of Mr Gladstone was a declaration, prompted by the Peers' adhesion to their amendments to the Parish Councils Bill, that the Government, in regard to the annihilating zeal of the House of Lords, must 'go forward to an issue,' and 'take fully, frankly, and finally the side of the House of Commons.' Mr Balfour condemned this as a 'declaration of war' against the ancient constitution of the realm. 'Let me tell the right honourable gentleman,' he said, 'that we look forward

without dismay to the fight, and that we are not perturbed by these obscure threats.'

Liberal threats were not, indeed, much to be feared at this time. The Government was described by the Home Secretary, Mr Asquith, as 'ploughing the sands.' Under Lord Rosebery as Prime Minister a good deal of the sand got into the bearings of the ploughing machinery. Lord Rosebery hopefully began by practically repudiating Home Rule in his 'predominant partner' speech; he and Sir William Harcourt, the leader of the House of Commons, were hardly on speaking terms; and, with the Parnellites now in full opposition, the difficulties of carrying on daily increased; the majority for the election of Speaker Gully descended to eleven. By dint of great tact and courage, Sir William Harcourt got through the one considerable task of 1894, his great Finance Bill, establishing for death duties the principle of graduation which has since been so greatly extended. The next session saw new furrows of sand, and Mr Lloyd George, most furious of Welsh democrats, was enjoying himself in protesting against the inadequacies of the Welsh Disestablishment Bill when the end came.

On June 21, 1895, the Government was defeated on an amendment to the Army Estimates, moved by Mr St John Brodrick, censuring the War Minister, Mr Campbell-Bannerman, on the ground that he had not supplied the Army with sufficient cordite. Mr Brodrick's enterprise was a private matter. Mr Balfour had delivered, earlier in the evening, an eulogy of the Duke of Cambridge, who had at length been induced to resign the office of Commander-in-Chief. His Royal Highness's departure from the Horse Guards was esteemed a triumph for the country as well as for the War Minister, and the

atmosphere was heavy with the fragrance of bouquets. When the cordite division was called Mr Balfour remarked to Mr Chamberlain that he 'supposed the Government would have their usual majority.' When the tellers approached the table, the clerk, by mistake, handed the paper with the figures to the Government Whip, who glanced at it and, with a shrug of his shoulders, handed it to the Conservative Whip, Mr Akers-Douglas. That gentleman, hardly able to believe the truth, handed it back. But arithmetic did not lie, and the figures on the paper read: Ayes to the right, 132; Noes to the left, 125. Mr Campbell-Bannerman at once resigned, and the Government went with him.

The Queen sent for Lord Salisbury, who formed a strong Government, this time of Liberal Unionists as well as Conservatives; Parliament was dissolved on July 8, and the country, by giving a Unionist majority of 152 over Liberals and Nationalists combined, justified the House of Lords in rejecting the Home Rule Bill. Mr Balfour's opponent in Manchester was again the indomitable Professor Munro, who was defeated by a majority of 776, an increase of 378 over that of 1892. Parliament met on August 12, and, two or three minutes after Mr Balfour had taken up his position on the Treasury Bench, there was an immense ovation as Mr Joseph Chamberlain, the new Colonial Secretary, came in and sat beside him. A chapter in general history had closed. A new chapter in Mr Balfour's personal history had begun.

CHAPTER IX

In 1895 Mr Balfour occupied an apparently enviable position. Still on the right side of fifty, he seemed to have before him many years of splendid activity. Two men alone could compare with him in capacity. But Lord Salisbury was more and more the hermit of the Foreign Office, advanced in years and out of touch with new currents of feeling, while Mr Chamberlain, adept in the Parliamentary game, had only slight experience of office.

The virtual fusion of the two wings of the Coalition contributed to add to the Conservative leader's prestige. So far a distinct division had existed. The compact of 1886, honourable to both sides, had been honourably observed; Mr Chamberlain and his friends had not only given the Government unwavering support on the Irish question, but had gone far beyond their undertaking. The result was not unhappy. Conservatism was tempered by a mildly progressive spirit, and the Coalition could justly claim that in many important matters essential Liberalism was on their side, and not on their opponents'. But so far Mr Chamberlain had declined to take office under a Conservative Prime Minister. Such hesitation was natural enough. We who read the political story backwards, and are more familiar with the end than with the beginning, are apt to think of the process of conversion as far swifter than was actually the case. For some years after 1886 the alliance, though never seriously threatened,—was always liable to rupture; and even as late as 1902 the Duke of Devonshire expressed himself

conscious of a division which Lord Rosebery found 'imperceptible to the practised eye.' Ten years was a period none too long to temper the Radicalism of Mr Chamberlain to a degree compatible with absorption into a Conservative Cabinet. The Radicalism was, of course, only tempered and given a new direction; it was never expelled, and even in his 'ransom' days Mr Chamberlain was not less a Tory than when he sat at the same Cabinet table with Lord Salisbury and Mr Balfour.

It was naturally felt at the time that the change from 'alliance' to 'indissoluble union,' symbolised by Mr Chamberlain's acceptance of the Colonial Secretaryship, imparted new solidity to the Unionist cause and new emphasis to Mr Balfour's ascendancy. But formal unity is not seldom less effective than loose alliance, and Mr Chamberlain, through no fault and by no design of his own, was destined to become for the second time a disruptive force. Almost from the time of his entrance into the Salisbury Cabinet there began a competition which undermined Mr Balfour's position, and, after many years, led to his fall. It was a competition of which, in all probability, Mr Chamberlain himself was mainly unconscious. Assuredly he did not accept Mr Balfour's leadership in order to conspire against it, and for Mr Balfour himself, with his 'genius for friendship,' he entertained the liveliest regard. But it was impossible for a man of his temperament to accept the ordinary position of a subordinate; and it was, after all, a subordinate's place that he filled, though his energy soon made the once despised Colonial Office the most talked of Department in the Government. The very contrast between the prestige of the statesman and the comparative unimportance (as it then appeared) of the post he

occupied was in a way an advertisement of his special standing in the Cabinet. As Chancellor of the Exchequer he would have been confessedly Mr Balfour's lieutenant; as Colonial Secretary he was still Mr Chamberlain, Mr Balfour's equal, there by his own fancy. It was out of the question that Mr Chamberlain should be second to any man, still less to one much younger than himself; and, had Mr Balfour been tactless or a weakling, he must, loyalty or no loyalty, have gone to the wall. But Mr Balfour had plenty of tact, and in his way was quite as courageous, quite as tenacious, quite as able as Mr Chamberlain. And he was very much more subtle. He may be compared (with the greatest possible deference) to the terrible sea-monster in Victor Hugo's romance, with the beak of a bird of prey and the body of a jelly-fish. His bite was formidable; his invulnerability was embarrassing; he had, like the squid, great clinging power; and, just as the mollusc's armoury of offence and defence includes an inky secretion, so he could always command in emergency a cloud of words which confused the attacker. Mr Balfour's tenacity, however, was of a special character. It had no relation to the same quality in men delighting in work for work's sake. It consisted, for the most part, of a determination first to keep his party together, and secondly to keep himself at the head of his party. If he was inspired by one sincere and overpowering conviction, it was that the safety and dignity of Great Britain depended on the supremacy of Conservatism, and he might be pardoned if, on a review of his record and a glance at the contemporary political gallery, he believed that the supremacy of Conservatism depended on the maintenance of his own authority. He was always determined that the style of the firm should be 'Balfour and Chamberlain.'

But while resolved to be king, he was by no means one of those busybody autocrats who must needs engross all power. Like Charles II, he was perfectly ready, so long as he kept the essentials, to let others earn the credit and the blame—especially the blame—in less vital matters. Mr Chamberlain he treated much as Charles did Shaftesbury at one time and Danby at another. He was too powerful to be resisted, but he could always be checked, and sometimes kept in the dark. He must have his way in some departments, if only to ensure that he should not have his way altogether.

There thus resulted a singular want of balance in the administration. On the one side there was much energy, not always inspired by sound judgment. On the other side there was a certain deprecating resentment of over-activity, which did not, however, preclude perfect willingness to bear responsibility and 'play the game' if things went awry—the *beau geste*, however, being possibly accompanied with just the slightest explanatory wink that 'Mr Chamberlain was really—what?' The right hand was not ignorant of what the left did; it always knew (if sometimes not from the beginning), it sometimes disapproved, but it could neither control nor get on without its fellow. The whole history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century might have been different if either of these men, each so strong in his own way, had exercised complete mastery. It is almost certain there would have been no Jameson Raid had Mr Balfour swayed despotically a Cabinet wholly consisting of nobodies. It is quite probable that there would have been no Boer War. It is extremely doubtful whether the Fashoda incident would have been carried so near the danger point; he, as well as Lord Salisbury, was fully in touch with Kitchener,

and firm on the main questions at issue, but he would hardly have stated them in Mr Chamberlain's way. For, like his uncle, though nurtured in the Disraelian tradition, Mr Balfour altogether lacked the gambling spirit of Mr Disraeli. Lord Salisbury, so reckless in his incursions into domestic politics, was caution personified in foreign policy, and Mr Balfour, in this at least, was the dutiful pupil of Lord Salisbury. In all these matters the inspiration was another's. The Government's South African policy was Mr Chamberlain's; so far as it was justified, his was the credit; so far as it was mistaken, the responsibility was his. During the three dark years of the war, Lord Salisbury as Prime Minister and Mr Balfour as First Lord of the Treasury were quite overshadowed by the Colonial Secretary. To the populace he was the hero; to the opposition he was the villain; to the Empire and the foreign world he was the British Government. Mr Chamberlain dominated all departments. He it was who chid foreign dignitaries as if they were Irish members, who told the French to 'mend their manners,' who one day scolded the German Chancellor, and almost the next suggested an Anglo-German alliance.

From 1895 to 1902 Mr Balfour efficiently led the House of Commons, carefully attended to questions of party organisation, and looked after matters of patronage. But otherwise his part was almost a secondary one. He was the official oil-can and master of the ceremonies. It was his to congratulate Queen Victoria on her Diamond Jubilee, and he did it, as he did all such things, with marvellous deftness. It was his, on the Queen's death, to pronounce a stately panegyric on the departed and offer tactful congratulations to the new monarch. It was his to tone down the occasional asperities of the Colonial

Secretary, to qualify little crudities, to conciliate the more friendly members of the Opposition, to pour polished scorn on the irreconcilables. It was his also to keep going the machinery of home government; it is worth noting that he took a great personal interest in the London Government Act of 1899, which transferred the duties of the old vestries to twenty-eight metropolitan boroughs, but still left over 300 authorities sharing among them the public administration of the capital. Mr Balfour's was no inconsiderable or unimportant task. But it lacked the spectacular glory of Mr Chamberlain's, and the popularity of the war (it was undeniably popular) implied the popularity of the statesman chiefly associated with it. Mr Balfour during those years was an incomparable second. Outside Great Britain his name began to have an unfamiliar or old-fashioned sound. In Parliament and in the country, however, he did good service by opposing to critics a more convincing and closely reasoned case than any other statesman was able to make. Mr Chamberlain's speeches suffered slightly from over-zeal; the incense had perhaps a little intoxicated him, and he sometimes spoke almost as if the war were his own private affair. He could rarely reply except by counter-attack, and the circumstances were not always appropriate to that strategy. Mr Balfour presented the national case with more restraint but not less effect; he defended the Colonial Secretary better than he could defend himself; he threw the protecting cloak of his reasoned and reasonable eloquence over the grave mismanagements of departments; he was by far the most formidable critic of the attitude of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and Mr Lloyd George; and his election manifesto in 1900 was a perfect example of dignity, calm courage, force, and logic.

The utter rout of the Liberals at the polls, to which Mr Balfour's calm and luminous speeches contributed as much as Mr Chamberlain's fiery addresses and pungent messages, accentuated the differences which had already arisen between the Imperialist and Pacifist wings of the party. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, through the secession of Lord Rosebery, Mr Asquith, Mr Haldane, and Sir Edward Grey, was left to lead the Little Englander rump, and his condemnation of the concentration camp scheme, as savouring of 'methods of barbarism,' completed the alienation of the Liberal Imperialists. There was never less effective Parliamentary criticism of the Government than in the third year of the war, and when at last Mr Balfour was able, on June 2, 1902, to announce the terms of the Boer surrender his Government appeared to enjoy a position of unassailable security. The war was won, and, whatever views might be held as to its necessity, whatever reflections might be made as to its cost, there was reason for congratulation in the thoroughness of the victory. A troublesome question had been removed. The strength, moral and military, of the British Empire had been illustrated; foreign Powers had been shown that, in any conflict with this country, the self-governing dominions must be taken into account. Such was the foreground view of the Government record. In the background was the diplomatic triumph of Fashoda and Kitchener's great victory at Omdurman, restoring the Sudan, and avenging the death of Gordon. Whatever might be said about Ministers, they could claim to have succeeded in their aims, and it was no small point that in each case their success was the sequel to a Liberal failure.

The prospects of the Government were, therefore,

superficially excellent. But during the very last stages of the war Mr Balfour introduced a measure which, however excellent in itself, contributed largely to his undoing. Some years before Lord Salisbury had told his party to 'capture the School Boards.' Mr Balfour used a war-made majority to accomplish this purpose. The Education Bill of 1902 marked in many ways an advance; it was certainly the most important step since 1870 towards the realisation of the ideals of serious educationalists. But, by putting voluntary (chiefly Church of England) schools on an equality with Board Schools so far as concerned the allocation of public funds, while permitting them to retain their privileges of private management, it created a Noncomformist grievance which told heavily against the Government; and the secession of many Nonconformist supporters had its influence in determining Mr Chamberlain to choose the new issue which was to involve the Unionist party in the gravest complications.

Why Mr Balfour should have been so resolved (the Education Bill was his own particular pet) on this policy of 'capturing the School Boards' is not clear. He is a member of the Scottish Church, and so little of a religious bigot that he has equally denounced the extreme Anglo-Catholics and those Protestants who opposed facilities for the higher education of Roman Catholics in Ireland. His general view of religion is extremely rationalistic, and his kinsman, Lord Hugh Cecil, regards him, theologically speaking, with little more favour than, as a boy of five, he did that celebrated nurse whom he suspected of being a Socinian. Probably Mr Balfour was urged partly by his genuine enthusiasm for education, and partly by the desire to please an important body of political supporters. It is possible

he did not realise how much the Bill would contribute to sharpening the differences between Liberal Unionists and Conservatives. 'I am afraid Jesse Collings is quite right,' wrote Sir Henry James to the Duke of Devonshire, 'as to the smashing blow inflicted on the Liberal Unionist party by the Education Bill. Our reports are black as night. . . . What can be done to make Arthur Balfour understand the position? If he makes no concession to the anti-clericalists I am quite sure there will be an opposition to the Bill being worked which will produce chaos.' Mr Chamberlain himself, though 'an optimist by profession,' was 'most gloomy.' 'Our best friends are leaving us by scores and hundreds,' he wrote, 'and they will not come back.'

The seeds of this trouble were already germinating when the resignation of Lord Salisbury on July 10, 1902, gave Mr Balfour the highest position in the State, and the leadership of the Unionist party as a whole. Lord Salisbury was in his seventy-third year, and in every respect an old man. The death of Queen Victoria, the opening of a bustling new reign, the suggestion (to put it no higher) of a decided change in foreign policy, had warned him that he had become something of an anachronism. His heart was never in the war, and its anxieties had done much to depress a spirit rather sturdy than elastic. For some time he had shown physical inadequacy to his work; and he now took advantage of the close of hostilities to lay down the burden. There was, superficially at least, complete unanimity as to his successor. At a great meeting of the Unionist party at the Foreign Office Conservatives ratified the choice, and emphatic assurances were given on behalf of the Duke of Devonshire and Mr Chamberlain. The meeting was attended by two

persons then quite inconspicuous, but destined to have great influence on Mr Balfour's future. One was Mr Andrew Bonar Law, the new Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade, a Scottish Canadian business man who had won a seat at Glasgow in 1900, and was said, by the few who had marked him, to have a good head for figures. The other was Mr Winston Spencer Churchill, son of Lord Randolph, who had served in a cavalry regiment, written books, and acted as war correspondent, and attracted some little notice during the war by his escape from Pretoria.

The change in the Premiership involved some reconstruction of the Ministry. The public was chiefly interested in the selection of Mr Austen Chamberlain, son of the Colonial Secretary, for the Post Office. But the appointment having the most important effects on the future was that of Mr Charles Thomson Ritchie as Chancellor of the Exchequer. A pronounced Free Trader, capable, stubborn, and somewhat commonplace, he entered office with the resolution of getting rid, as soon as might be, of the shilling corn tax imposed for war purposes by his predecessor, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach. The Cobdenic orthodoxy of Mr Ritchie was to be a considerable element in the quarrel which was shortly to destroy all the fair hopes entertained of the renovated Ministry and of Mr Balfour's Premiership.

CHAPTER X

Mr Harold Skimpole, who saw in the Court of Chancery an institution designed by a beneficent Providence as a sort of punching-bag for men of too-abounding energy, might well have found satisfaction in the circumstances which condemned the two ablest politicians of their day to a long contest of laborious futility. The history of the Tariff Reform controversy is in essence the history of two men of wholly dissimilar character, separated by considerable differences of opinion, divided still more sharply by temperamental incompatibility, but still bound by a multitude of ties which neither cared to snap.

No two men in the House of Commons at the beginning of this century had fewer points in common than Mr Balfour and Mr Chamberlain. Mr Balfour has been compared with the elegant Halifax as portrayed by Macaulay: 'his understanding keen, sceptical, inexhaustibly fertile in distinctions and objections, his taste refined, his sense of the ludicrous exquisite; his temper placid and forgiving, but fastidious and by no means prone either to malevolence or to enthusiastic admiration.' Historical comparisons are misleading, and there was much in Mr Balfour that the great Trimmer lacked. To find even so superficial a likeness to Mr Chamberlain we should explore in vain the portrait galleries of the past, but some of his characteristics are reproduced in a living statesman. Mr Chamberlain was as like Mr Lloyd George as any Englishman of his time could be to any Welshman born so much later. Masterful,

eager, empirical; destitute of a political philosophy; impatient of privilege and tradition in the abstract, but prone to be fascinated by them in the concrete; keenly perceptive, but possessing what one may call a one-dimension sight, so that he grasped but one question, and but one side of any question, at the same time; extraordinarily shrewd in certain things, rather ingenuous in others; gifted with equal genius for friendship and vendetta; capable of high and unselfish enthusiasms, but sometimes lacking in magnanimity; given to grandiose conceptions, in which, however, there always lurked a prosaic element; facile in changing his views, but changeless in the intensity with which he acted on the convictions of the moment; ready to send others to the stake for believing to-day what he himself believed yesterday, and that with as little humour as mercy—such was Mr Chamberlain throughout life; the greatest recent example of the ' practical ' dreamer.

On the face of it, no two men were less likely to agree. Yet there undoubtedly existed a real friendship between Mr Balfour and his great colleague; and, naturally enough, the warmer feelings were on the side of the more energetic character. Mr Chamberlain entertained an intense admiration for those qualities of his leader which supplemented, while not coming into competition with, his own. Moreover, he was a man never given to half-measures; those whom he disliked, he disliked heartily; those whom he honoured with his friendship had it without reserve. Mr Balfour's sentiments were rather less simple; nobody, in public life at least, has succeeded really in getting to know him. Mr Balfour is an island, entirely surrounded by urbanity (modified by some puzzling cross currents) and many determined attempts at invasion have failed. The friendship

with Mr Chamberlain probably resembled those marriages in which one party loves and the other consents, and even with some satisfaction, to be loved. Another factor in this strange intimacy may be mentioned. Mr Chamberlain was the fondest of fathers, and, while Mr Balfour held possession of the Unionist party machine, the fortunes of his son Austen, who had as yet no such reputation as to make patronage unnecessary, were dependent on the goodwill of the Unionist leader.

But while such considerations might operate to prevent Mr Chamberlain decisively parting from Mr Balfour when he found that the latter was not prepared to go all his road, they could not suffice to restrain him from action certain to embarrass the Prime Minister. Mr Chamberlain was above all a fighter, and the moment he got anything into his own head his first impulse was to break heads less favoured. At the Colonial Office he had, in constant contact with other ideas, insensibly weakened in his once strongly held but insufficiently pondered Free Trade principles; the War, stimulating a desire for closer relations with the oversea dominions, had turned his mind more positively to the Dominion statesmen's demands for Preference; and within a few months he had passed from dubiousness to certainty, and from certainty to fiery enthusiasm. It is improbable that the wish to divert public attention from matters concerning the war played any decisive part in this rapid growth of fiscal conviction. But the secessions over the Education Bill undoubtedly troubled Mr Chamberlain; he had, like all war ministers, to fear a revulsion of popular feeling; and that he was not unwilling, for purely party considerations, to present a new issue to the country was made clear as early as May, 1902, when

he declared that opponents might find that 'the issues they propose to raise are not the issues on which we shall take the opinion of the country.'

Whatever the main element in his conversion, Mr Chamberlain was forced by the law of his nature to proclaim it. He did so in the famous speech of May, 1903. But the real story begins some months earlier, in the autumn of 1902. The idea was then to present the country, in the least offensive way, with an accomplished fact. Mr Chamberlain proposed to the Cabinet that a preference should be given to corn grown within the Empire, and pointed out that the shilling duty on corn imposed by Sir Michael Hicks-Beach (for revenue purposes only) would simplify the execution of this policy. You made the shilling duty permanent as regarded foreign wheat; you remitted it on Colonial wheat, and the thing was done. The scheme was a clever one, and only an accident upset it. In making this proposal Mr Chamberlain reckoned without Mr Ritchie, the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, who was quite determined that his first Budget should be distinguished by the abolition of a tax which he regarded as electorally unpopular, unjust to the poorer classes, and a departure from the Free Trade principles to which he was passionately attached. At this Autumn Cabinet Mr Ritchie stated his objections with perfect clearness, and even heat. But Mr Chamberlain, who was about to leave for his South African tour, assumed that all the other Ministers had accepted his policy, and naturally felt that Mr Ritchie occupied no such position as to be able to impose a veto. The fact seems to have been that the Duke of Devonshire was asleep, that the minor Ministers were naturally timid of plunging into unknown controversial depths,

and that Mr Chamberlain took this general silence for consent. Mr Balfour, of course, knew already, in general terms, what was in his mind, and, in equally general terms, approved. He was perfectly willing to introduce Preference by a side wind, and at this time there seemed no obstacle in the way.

But when Mr Chamberlain returned, on the eve of the presentation of the Budget, he found, to his irritated surprise, that Mr Ritchie persisted in his refusal to renew the Corn duty, and had determined to resign rather than yield. Mr Balfour would not face such a disruption of his Cabinet; and it was the Government, not Mr Ritchie, that yielded. Mr Ritchie brought forward his own Budget in his own way, and, in the manner of a pattern Free Trade Minister, lectured the House of Commons (and incidentally Mr Chamberlain) on the iniquity of taxing the people's food. After this it was quite impossible to proceed unostentatiously by administrative means; the fiscal fight was forced into the open by one man's obstinate determination; and instead of the Government having to defend a single Budget proposal, it was exposed to attack on the whole vast question of economic policy.

Mr Chamberlain was not a man to take such a rebuff lying down, and lost no time in forcing the issue on the country. On the same day in May both leaders made important speeches, the points of divergence in which excited one section of public opinion as much as the points of similarity alarmed another. Mr Balfour, in defending Mr Ritchie's abolition of the corn duty—that same corn duty which he had decided to retain for the purpose of Mr Chamberlain's Preference scheme—told a deputation that in certain events there might have to be a small corn duty in connection with a general

preferential system. But such a movement, he hastened to add, was only possible if approved by the 'conscience and intellect' of the general mass of the people. Mr Chamberlain was far more emphatic. He reminded his hearers that Canada, which had already given substantial preference to British goods, was prepared to go further if some preference were given in return to her corn. 'If,' said Mr Chamberlain, 'I had been speaking solely in regard to my position as Secretary of State for the Colonies, I should have said, "that is a fair offer, that is a generous offer from your point of view, and it is an offer which I might ask our people to accept"; but, speaking for the Government as a whole, not in the interests of the Colonies, I am obliged to say that it is contrary to the established fiscal policy of this country.' Mr Chamberlain went on to point out the two alternatives before the people of the Empire:—

'They may maintain if they like in all its severity the interpretation—in my mind an entirely artificial and wrong interpretation—which has been placed upon the doctrines of Free Trade by a small remnant of Little Englanders of the Manchester School. In that case they will be absolutely precluded from any kind of preference or favour to any of their colonies abroad, or even of protecting their colonies abroad when they offer to favour us. That is the first alternative. The second alternative is that we will not be bound by any purely technical definition of Free Trade, that, whilst we seek as our chief object free interchange of trade between ourselves and all nations of the world, we will nevertheless recover our freedom and resume that power of negotiation, and if necessary of retaliation, whenever our interests

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and our relations between our colonies and ourselves are threatened by other people.'

'I desire,' concluded Mr Chamberlain, 'that a discussion on this subject shall be opened,' and he went on to declare that the fiscal question would be the issue of the next election.

A few days later a considerable enlargement of these propositions was made in the House of Commons. Mr Balfour declared himself in favour of retaliation against ultra-Protectionist Powers: questioned the theory that import taxes should be imposed for revenue purposes only; described Imperial Preference as a fair question for debate; but added that he did not himself regard the taxation of food as at present within the range of practical politics. 'The question,' he said, 'is not one that this House will have to decide this session, or next session, or the session after; it is not a question that the existing House of Commons will have to decide at all. . . . It is a question of our future fiscal policy which requires a most careful study.' The two leaders were clearly not far apart speculatively. But Mr Chamberlain represented the mood of 'Do it now,' and Mr Balfour murmured 'Not this year or next year, but some time, and perhaps never.' The difference was not one of doctrine, but of temperament. Mr Chamberlain was ready to risk all. Mr Balfour was willing to take some risk, but it must be a little one. The plan wrecked by Mr Ritchie as involving little risk, had obtained his blessing. When that plan was disposed of, Mr Balfour could not resist Mr Chamberlain's desire for discussion, and he may also have miscalculated the probable effects of such a ventilation of the new ideas. But when he realised, as he quickly did, the extent to which the country was moved,

his whole energy was concentrated on a single object: the preservation of the party and the maintenance of his own leadership. He could not, and did not, repudiate Tariff Reform; he could, and did, work to postpone it. Some years later, when it seemed likely to win, he gave it his unequivocal blessing. But so long as it seemed to threaten the disruption of the Unionist party, his ingenuity was solely concerned with the invention of various formulæ to avert that calamity. He did not succeed wholly in averting it, but he did succeed in deferring it and lessening its violence; and there is, properly understood, no more brilliant passage in Mr Balfour's career than that which bears superficially the aspect of tragic failure. For, though his tactics produced in the end an electoral disaster of the first magnitude, he may be fairly held to have saved many things, more important than Conservative prosperity, which would have been in dire peril had the smash of January, 1906, occurred in 1903.

CHAPTER XI

In taking the course he pursued in 1903, Mr Balfour was only obeying his instincts. He was always inclined to what the Free Trader would deem economic heresy; it might almost be said that the mere fact that the doctrine of Cobden was received without question was to him sufficient ground for questioning it. Many of the main tenets of Free Trade he accepted; it was, for example, impossible for so intelligent a man to take the vulgar view that the success of other countries was something to be deplored. At New Cross, in 1901, he protested against the idea that 'any successful manufacture started by any other country was a kind of robbery committed on British trade'; we were not poorer, but richer, because other nations were rich. But he resented the dogmatism of the complete Cobdenist, and he had a certain contempt for Cobden himself, which was probably due—so curiously masterful are associations and prejudices even in minds of uncommon elevation—to the fact that that great man was after all no great gentleman, statesman, or philosopher, but only a commercial traveller. 'Cobden,' he said once, 'was rather a political missionary than a statesman, an agitator rather than an administrator. . . . His defects happily conspired with his merits to render him a fitting instrument for carrying out the inevitable change in our fiscal policy which was the most important work of his public life.' As far back as 1876 Mr Balfour had declared himself a Bimetallist; five years later he had argued in favour of retaliatory duties on the

products of nations imposing tariffs intended to exclude British goods. Thus, long before Mr Chamberlain had turned his attention to fiscal questions, Mr Balfour had advanced far in what was generally considered economic heterodoxy. But speculation is one thing, and action another. Mr Balfour tried only once to translate theory into practice; it was a question of diluting with silver the gold reserve of the Bank of England, and the protests of the City were sufficiently vigorous to make him think twice before again meddling with the superstitions of the vulgar. It is pretty certain that, left alone, Mr Balfour would have remained intellectually scornful of the extreme Free Trade position, but would never have ventured to propose any sweeping change in British fiscal policy. Of course, if anything could be done, without fuss or risk, to tone down the crudities of undiluted Cobdenism, well and good. But better that the credulous should live and die in error than that there should be breaking of heads and splitting of parties.

Of his own motion Mr Balfour would assuredly not have precipitated the crisis of 1903. But he was impelled by the energy of Mr Chamberlain, a powerful Minister, who could not be treated like Mr Henry Chaplin or Colonel Howard Vincent, hitherto almost the sole declared protagonists of 'Fair Trade.' Mr Chamberlain was insistent; the corn duty seemed to afford an easy means of meeting him; and there appeared no great risk of a party split. For if Preference had been introduced through the Budget, the Unionist Free Traders would have been confronted with a most awkward choice; they must accept the Government's proposals, or they must turn the Government out then and there: a very rare event in recent Parliamentary history.

But when this plan was defeated, Mr Balfour conceived the position to be altogether altered. It was no longer a question of the manipulation of an existing duty, but a raising of the direct issue of protective taxation of food. Mr Balfour was inclined to drop the whole thing like a red-hot poker. But Mr Chamberlain, possessed with the one idea to the exclusion of all others, had fully made up his mind to bring his scheme before the public, and Mr Balfour had to give way. He therefore agreed, rather reluctantly, to an attempt to 'educate public opinion,' and it was with his concurrence that the ball was started by Mr Chamberlain. The latter, however, with his impetuosity and plain-speaking, at once went far beyond the discreet and tentative 'adumbration' Mr Balfour had in mind; once the step was taken retirement was impossible; the country was profoundly stirred; and both Ministers were carried away by the strength of the forces they had released. Mr Chamberlain, who in May had declared himself a Free Trader, who was at least 'perfectly certain' that he was 'not a Protectionist,' was soon pushed by the vehemence of the public opinion he had himself evoked into a position far more decided. There was at first, indeed, no great popular feeling on either side. But the 'interests,' scenting good business, at once entered the arena, and, through the Tariff Reform League and other agencies, pushed the new policy with great vigour and success; the opposition, with equally interested motives of another kind, and backed by the mercantile, banking, and shipping magnates who felt their position threatened by the menace to Free Trade, naturally would not let the matter rest. Thus Mr Balfour found that all his caution had been futile; the dam had gone, and instead of the trickle

of educative propaganda there was a roaring flood of agitation.

In these circumstances he invented the formula of 'inquiry'; inquiry was found, in the result, to mean the issue of vast quantities of undigested statistics by the Board of Trade. But the incantation of 'inquiry' was useful so far that discussion was burked in Parliament and Ministers were muzzled in the country. Mr Balfour, though nearly swept off his feet, had never lost his head, and, if he could still not resist the current, he was henceforward in the position to give it some degree of direction. His chief concern at the time was the attitude of the Duke of Devonshire, who had early protested against the implications of Mr Chamberlain's May speech. The Duke, though a life-long Free Trader, was quite ready to regard the Cobdenic doctrine as a human ordinance, with possibly some measure of human imperfection. But he was opposed to any changes which, while they might improve the condition of certain of the higher classes of labour, might, in the case of millions, 'reduce the margin between poverty and absolute want.' If the proposed advantages in connection with the Colonies were only to be purchased at the expense of privation and hardship on the part of our own people, then there was, he thought, 'no policy more certain to hasten the dissolution of the Empire.'

Mr Balfour was acting on a sound instinct in paying little regard to the minor Free Traders in the Cabinet, but in straining every effort to prevent the resignation of the Duke. The attitude of the latter was of enormous importance. Johnson speaks somewhere of the peculiar 'dependability' of the Duke of Devonshire of his day. This quality had descended to the Liberal Unionist statesman then

nearing the fiftieth year of a variegated political life. He was not much admired, he was in no sense loved, but he was trusted without limit. Hating public speaking, and extraordinarily lazy, he yawned his way through life, and it was a positive pain to him in his later years to deliver his mind. Had he been a whit less public-spirited, he would have retired long ago behind his park palings. But the Duke was always under the dominion of a conscience which, while masterfully pointing out his way, never applauded him for pursuing it. He detested responsibility and often tried to shelve it, but could never succeed, since by the nature of things he became the father confessor of every doubting politician, the refuge of every leader in a quandary, and the depository of every awkward burden. The reason of all this was that the Duke, though painfully slow, and unimaginative as a country attorney, was, at bottom, a quite unusually clear-headed man, thoroughly honest, and free from any suspicion of self-interest.

The Duke acted with the heavy-footed caution of an elephant trying a doubtful river crossing. He passed from puzzledom to distrust, from distrust to dislike, and from dislike to whole-hearted opposition. Mr Balfour's letters to him during the summer of 1903 exhibit some irritation over the awkwardness of the situation set up by Mr Chamberlain's activity. 'His speech has not made either the Parliamentary or the Cabinet situation easier,' he writes to the Duke on June 4. 'I should much have preferred that the controversy, which I believe in any case to have been inevitable, should have been allowed to develop in a more peaceful and regular manner.' 'Chamberlain's extraordinary vigour and controversial skill,' he writes on another occasion, 'has thoroughly

alarmed them' (the Free Trade members of the Cabinet). 'They feel that if they give an inch an ell will be taken, and though they had no belief in the old dogmas they liked them because they were definite and precise and because they knew not whither the current of events would sweep them if they once abandoned the familiar anchorage.'

Mr Balfour's own position is perhaps best expressed in his letter to the Duke at the end of August:—

'I do not believe—indeed I have never believed—that the old dogmas are theoretically sound. I do believe that they have served a very useful purpose at a certain stage of our political development. But they are in many respects unsuited to our present industrial and national position. I think we must be prepared to modify them. Just as I am not a Socialist, so I am not a Protectionist; and as in the case of social reform, so in the case of fiscal reform, I think the mere fact of our increasing the number of "open" questions makes it more than ever necessary to approach their consideration in a spirit of cautious moderation.'

We have here the Laodicean whose ultimate fate with enthusiasts can never be a matter of doubt. But there is generally something to be said for Laodicea; and there was in this instance. To Mr Balfour Free Trade was not sacred, and its modification might even be a considerable object of policy. But there were other things more important: the unity of Unionism, and his own leadership. One-sided Free Trade might be a bad thing. But the revival of the Home Rule controversy and of Gladstonian foreign policy ideals would be a worse thing. Feeling

this strongly, he was not a little irritated with the extremists on both sides, and almost angry with those who paraded their principles on what he regarded as a matter of pure expediency. Objects of this scornful displeasure were his kinsman, Lord Hugh Cecil, and the son of his old colleague, Mr Winston Churchill. The latter early went into revolt. 'You will easily see,' he wrote to the Duke of Devonshire in June, 'that this must end in an open split, and that the Tory dissentients will be driven to make the same sort of arrangements as the Liberal Unionists in 1886. . . . I do not think that Mr Balfour quite realises how determined people are against a reversion to Protection.' Three months later he is still more emphatic: 'I don't think,' he wrote, 'Mr Balfour and those about him realise at all how far the degeneration of the forces of Unionism has proceeded, and how tremendous the undercurrent is going to be.'

The 'open mind,' indeed, might have had a chance in May or June. By the late summer it was no longer possible. The Unionist Free Fooders were exposed to attack in their constituencies, while the 'truce' prevented them from hitting back. The Tariff Reform movement, on the other hand, had acquired such an impetus that Mr Chamberlain himself could not have checked it if he wished—and he was far from wishing. Mr Balfour was forced to another attempt to find common ground. With this object he submitted to the Cabinet on August 13 two papers, one of which has been published under the title 'Economic Notes on Insular Free Trade'; the other has not seen the light. 'Insular Free Trade' does not too happily illustrate Mr Balfour's power of analytical disquisition. But regarded as an attempt to get two hostile parties to accept a common

formula, while committing nobody to definite action, it is highly ingenious. The Tariff Reformer might there find all the admissions he wanted; the Free Trader might discern no great harm in speculations of what might happen to Barbados in a remarkable set of circumstances, and what might be the fate of Great Britain in the unlikely event of every country in the world conspiring to ruin her in their own despite. But unfortunately for Mr Balfour, neither Tariff Reformer nor Free Trader was interested in the 'dynamics of trade,' or the limitations of Adam Smith, or the 'extraordinary foolishness' of fanatical Cobdenism. The Tariff Reformer wanted to know if Mr Balfour was going to tax foreign corn, and (still better) foreign manufactured goods. The Free Trader, quite unconcerned whether Free Trade was 'a moral imperative of binding force,' or simply 'the concise description of a fiscal ideal,' wanted to know whether Mr Balfour was going to allow Mr Chamberlain, a Minister, to continue to attack his fellow-Ministers in their own constituencies.

The Cabinet meeting broke up without agreement, and a month was allowed for further discussion. Mr Balfour was catechised by the Duke of Devonshire as to his fiscal convictions, and his replies made the Duke feel 'very low' about things in general. Discussing the possible answers to Mr Chamberlain, Mr Balfour said there was the answer Mr Chamberlain would like, 'an answer which goes perilously near to general protection.' There was the answer which Mr Balfour would like to give, which 'is based on Free Trade and offers, I believe, the best hope of maintaining Free Trade.'

'There is lastly the answer which Balfour of Burleigh, I gather, is resolved to give, which is a

mere *non possumus*. This, which, in point of form, seems the most negative of the three, is really the one which will most quickly produce the most serious consequences. For it will not merely break up the Unionist party; it will shatter each wing of the Unionist party, dividing Tory from Tory and Liberal from Liberal. This is dynamite with a vengeance. I still hope for better things.'

The Duke's commentary (to Lord James of Hereford) was that the Prime Minister's course seemed to him the most impossible of all. 'I am completely puzzled and distracted by all the arguments *pro* and *con* Free Trade and Protection; but, whichever of them is right, I cannot think that something which is neither, but a little of both, can be right.'

When the Cabinet assembled on September 14 Mr Balfour met his Ministers with Mr Chamberlain's resignation, dated five days earlier, in his pocket. 'I think,' Mr Chamberlain wrote, 'that with absolute loyalty to your Government and its general policy, I can best promote the cause I have at heart from without; and I cannot but hope that, in a perfectly independent position, my arguments would be received with less prejudice than would attach to those of a party leader.' Mr Balfour, replying on September 16, stated that the only difference between him and Mr Chamberlain had been in regard to the practicability of the changes involved in the establishment of a preferential system. He was convinced that public opinion was not yet ripe for any taxation, however slight, on food stuffs, and Preference would 'almost certainly' involve such taxation. On the other hand, he thought the country was prepared to consider without prejudice the 'other branch of fiscal reform (Retaliation) to which we both attach

importance.' Referring to the resignation, he said, 'How can I criticise your determination? The loss to the Government is great, but the gain to the cause you have at heart may be greater still. If so, what can I do but acquiesce?'

Mr Balfour did not tell his colleagues that Mr Chamberlain had resigned. Like the Manchester Alderman in the matter of the gondolas, he was anxious to 'let nature take its course' so far as concerned the irreconcilable Free Traders in the Cabinet. If they were told that Mr Chamberlain was going, they might (a tragic possibility) be inclined themselves to stay. If they assumed that Mr Chamberlain was to stay, they might go. The last thing Mr Balfour wanted was for Mr Ritchie and Lord Balfour of Burleigh to stay. He had no personal fancy for either, and was impatient with their purism; such fastidiousness might be borne in a very clever man, or in a great nobleman like the Duke of Devonshire, but was not to be tolerated in smaller people. The two Ministers circulated a statement of their views, and were immediately told that, holding such views, they must go. 'I never saw anything more summary and decisive,' said the Duke of Devonshire, 'than the dismissal of these Ministers.' Mr Balfour, when he made up his mind (especially on these personal questions) seldom failed to act with decision. With Mr Ritchie and Lord Balfour ultimately went Lord George Hamilton, against whom Mr Balfour had less feeling. These Ministers were under the impression that the Duke of Devonshire was immediately resigning also; they did not know the Duke was under a pledge to see Mr Balfour before taking any decisive course. He saw Mr Balfour, who hinted that Mr Chamberlain might resign, and afterwards spoke of a 'strong

possibility' of this event. The Duke decided after all to resign; but on Mr Balfour telling him point-blank, a day later, that Mr Chamberlain had left the Cabinet, he agreed to continue. 'I suppose you will damn me,' he wrote to a friend, but, he added, 'the position seemed to me absurd that both Chamberlain and I, who had been opposing him, should both leave Balfour.' The Duke, acutely conscious that he seemed to occupy the position of having lured his colleagues on to resign, while careful to retain his own place, passed a miserable fortnight while Mr Balfour reconstructed his shattered Cabinet. To fill, however inadequately, the vacancy caused by Mr Chamberlain's retirement an old fellow-'Soul,' Mr Alfred Lyttleton, joined the two others (Mr George Wyndham and Mr Brodrick) already associated with Mr Balfour; while the great post of Chancellor of the Exchequer was allotted to Mr Chamberlain's son and political heir. This task concluded, Mr Balfour delivered on October 1 a speech at Sheffield which determined the Duke's long hesitation. Mr Balfour spoke rather decisively for him, and one sentence stood out boldly and clearly. 'If I were asked,' he said, 'Do you desire to alter fundamentally the fiscal tradition that has prevailed during the last two generations? I should reply "I do." I should ask the people of this country to reverse, to annul, and delete altogether from their maxims of public conduct the doctrine that you must never put on taxation except for revenue purposes.' He added, characteristically, that he would have preferred to leave Tariff Reform an open question, but, as he had been obliged to give a lead, this was his lead. The Duke, after pondering this speech, found it would not do, and on October 3 tendered his definite resignation.

Mr Balfour was furious; indeed, the Duke's vacillations might well have ruffled the sweetest temper, and Mr Balfour's temper, generally equable, could sometimes flare up savagely. It did so now. He replied to the Duke in 'a style for challengers, like Turk to Christian.' It would be an exaggeration to say that all the suppressed emotions of weeks found expression after this disappointment; doubtless they were inexpressible in any language. But Mr Balfour wrote with bitter emphasis, and in angry reproach:—

'Till one o'clock this afternoon, I had, I confess, counted you not as an opponent, but as a colleague —a colleague in spirit as well as in name. . . . If any other man in the world but yourself had expended so much inquisitorial subtlety in detecting imaginary heresies, I should have surmised that he was more anxious to pick a quarrel than particular as to the sufficiency of its occasion. . . . Had you resigned on the 15th, or had you not resigned at all, the healing effect (of the new declaration of policy) would have suffered no interruption. To resign now, and to resign on the speech, is to take the course most calculated to make yet harder the hard task of peace-maker. . . . Doubtless there is no imaginable occasion on which you could have left a Unionist Administration without inflicting on it a serious loss. At the moment of its most buoyant prosperity your absence from its councils would have been sensibly felt. But you have, in fact, left it when (in the opinion at least of our opponents) its fortunes are at their lowest and its perplexities at their greatest.'

The final sentence merely stated the fact. Mr Balfour's position was forlorn and even tragic. Within

less than three weeks he had suffered the loss of five colleagues, one of them the most remarkable Englishman of the age, the other the most generally trusted politician then living. But this was not the worst. If the resignations had left Mr Balfour with a Cabinet which, however weakened, was at least united, his case would have been comparatively happy. The stayers, however, were scarcely less divided than the seceders. There was a Chamberlain party in the Cabinet, as in the country; there were professors, perhaps honest but certainly puzzled, of the Prime Minister's special creed; there were stealthy Free Fooders who considered £5000 a year worth a little hypocrisy. Mr Balfour could trust nobody; it is only fair to add that very few trusted him. Yet for two years, with schism in his Cabinet, mutiny in the House of Commons, and delirious confusion in the country, he held on his way. It was a marvellous feat, possible only to one possessing the coolest courage and the most exquisite skill. Whether it was high statesmanship, or even good politics, is a question the answer to which will depend on the view taken of Mr Balfour's real object.

CHAPTER XII

Some sentences in the Sheffield speech seemed to indicate that Mr Balfour was himself not far from resignation when his Cabinet fell on disaster. He was certainly filled with all the weariness and disgust of the very clever and cool-headed man who finds himself the sport of what he may well think folly as well as enthusiasm. But in a few weeks he had pulled himself together; and, having made up his mind to resist every kind of extremist, he pursued his course, not only with extraordinary dexterity, but with the prodigious and almost feminine obstinacy underlying his superficially accommodating character.

What were his motives in thus battling, not for victory, but for the mere postponement of a crisis that could not be averted? Mr Balfour, possessor of a first-class intelligence, could not possibly be blind to the character of the forces making for his discomfiture. He must have known that the Tariff Reform split was fundamental, and could not be repaired by mere tactful cobbling. Moreover, as a statesman of great Parliamentary experience, he could not be ignorant of the fact that, the longer he remained in office with a discredited Cabinet and a divided party, the more sure he was of crushing defeat when at last he ventured to appeal to the country. An election in 1903 might, as Mr Chamberlain certainly thought, have justified itself; the Opposition was still feeble and disunited, and the party in possession would have had a considerable advantage. A deferred election, on the other hand, was almost sure to end in disaster.

All this must have been perfectly plain to so accomplished and shrewd a tactician as Mr Balfour. Why, then, did he take all risks rather than face a general election? The answer is probably to be sought in the overcast foreign horizon. Without stopping to inquire whether Mr Balfour took supreme control at the time he did with the special object of carrying out a reversal of the traditional British foreign policy, we may say that the first five or six years of the century were emphatically a period of rapid transition. The whole world was in a state of unstable equilibrium. Early in 1902 certain middle-aged men in a hurry had, after a most ingenuous series of proposals, signed a Treaty of alliance with the Asiatic and pagan Empire of Japan: a treaty without precedent in the history of European diplomacy. The wisdom or otherwise of that instrument is not here in question; it is sufficient simply to indicate its results. Forces were at once liberated which were destined to change the whole face of Europe, and are probably not even yet exhausted. Mr Balfour could not possibly foresee the ultimate results of this excursion from 'magnificent isolation': the heavy defeat of Russia, the repercussion of that defeat on her dynastic solidity, the diminution of her military power and prestige in Europe, the great gain in comparative strength of the Triple Alliance, the challenge to France in Morocco, the Turkish revolution, the Austrian annexation of Bosnia, the Italian annexation of Tripoli, the Balkan war, and the general conflagration of 1914. But he was sufficiently seized of the situation between Japan and Russia to be aware, shortly after Mr Chamberlain's resignation, that events of incalculable import were about to happen in the distant theatre of Eastern Asia. Even supposing that the Entente with France

was an improvisation due to circumstances rather than to premeditation, a mind so acute could not be insensible to the dangers to Europe, remote as well as immediate, which must be involved in this struggle for supremacy in the Far East. It is probable, therefore, that while Mr Chamberlain was thinking of nothing but his fiscal policy, and 'Whole Hoggers,' 'Little Piggers,' and Free Traders were engaged in an interchange of bad language and worse economics, Mr Balfour had chiefly in mind an altogether different set of considerations. In 1903 and 1904 he had either to keep office or to hand over the Government of the country to the distrusted hands of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman while a great war was raging, and Great Britain might at any time be called on to fulfil onerous obligations to her ally. In 1905 he was faced with the beginnings of a new perplexity. Prussianised Germany had begun to show her hand, and momentous changes, which may or may not have been for some time in contemplation, were quite suddenly forced on British policy. At first they took the simple form of a naval reshuffle. The tactical disposition of the Fleet was changed, and a great preponderance of force was concentrated in home waters. But this necessarily implied an understanding with France, and the establishment of the Entente Cordiale, facilitated by the genial personal influence of King Edward VII., was Mr Balfour's method of meeting a menace of which he early—perhaps earlier than is generally supposed—recognised the real meaning.

To give a new direction to British foreign policy, a direction which could not be seriously modified by his successors, time was necessary, and it was for time for that purpose that Mr Balfour was fighting during months of seemingly futile tactics of evasion.

We have to consider Mr Balfour during the great domestic controversy as a mere fiscal Gallio, but also as a patriotic statesman of European mind, and one who felt a special responsibility for British foreign policy. His was a far less impressive part than that of Mr Chamberlain, the passionate pilgrim of Tariff Reform. But the historian will probably decide that it was a part extremely useful to the country, perhaps even indispensable to its safety, and it was a part played with consummate ability and (in the only sense that mattered) with distinguished success. Mr Balfour could not as a thinker, and would not as a party politician, spurn the whole Chamberlain policy as a heresy. But he did, by every possible means, seek to shelve it as an inconvenience. This of course meant that with every month the gulf between him and Mr Chamberlain yawned wider. In May, 1903, they were pretty well as one. But as time went on Mr Chamberlain, subject to his ardent imagination and impelled by the forces he had liberated, became more and more Protectionist, and more and more eager to translate his ideas into practice. Mr Balfour, on the other hand, did not exactly recede from his convictions, but became constantly more determined to postpone any action which might precipitate the calamity he dreaded.

Mr Chamberlain, with his rather narrowly acute vision, was convinced (and quite possibly justly) that an early election would give him the victory he desired. Believing this, and failing altogether to grasp Mr Balfour's larger point of view, he was naturally irritated to see electoral opportunity frittered away. The Unionist Free Traders were equally angered by the failure of the Prime Minister to protect them against the attacks of Tariff Reformers. Mr Churchill solved the problem by crossing the

floor early in 1905, and was followed by two others; but the apostasy was confined to very narrow limits. There was always a hope, as Lord Hugh Cecil expressed it, that 'Mr Balfour would eventually come out nearer the Duke of Devonshire than Mr Chamberlain'; and they scanned his every speech with agonised eagerness for assurances that could not be whittled away. They were invariably disappointed; however much either side might shake the fence, Mr Balfour never lost his balance. Towards the autumn of 1904, however, Mr Chamberlain forced the pace, and Mr Balfour had to supplement the 'Economic Notes' and the Sheffield speech. At Edinburgh, on October 3, after describing himself as 'individually not a Protectionist,' he propounded his 'two elections' scheme. First there must be a British general election; then, if a Unionist Government were returned to power, it would call a Colonial Conference, a 'free conference' at which the whole question of Preference could be discussed 'without special instructions' between the representatives of the Oversea Dominions and the representatives of Great Britain. Then the decision of this conference would be again submitted to the electors before any definite step was taken. 'Imperial unification must not be hastily forced on public opinion, and it must be looked at from a political and patriotic standpoint rather than from that of economics or profit and loss.'

In plain English, the whole question was thus postponed to the Greek Kalends, and a Lancastrian Free Trader, hating Tariff Reform but equally loathing the newer Radicalism, might cheerfully take any small risk involved in voting for the Unionist candidate at the next election. It is amazing that Mr Chamberlain should have given his approval

to this declaration, which meant, if it meant anything, that he could never live to enforce his policy. Yet Mr Chamberlain actually greeted it with enthusiasm, though somewhat demurring to the second election. The speech, in fact, accomplished for the moment everything that Mr Balfour had in mind; it flattered the Tariff Reformers by approving their principle; it reassured Free Traders by emphasising the practical obstacles; above all it secured Mr Balfour an extended fiscal holiday. Early in 1905, however, the soothing effect of this soporific had worn off, and at Manchester Mr Balfour, in reply to Mr John Morley's challenge, produced his famous 'half sheet of note-paper.' This singular document, so often quoted, ran as follows:—

'First, I desire such an alteration of our fiscal system as will give us a freedom of action impossible while we hold ourselves bound by the maxim that no taxation should be imposed except for revenue. I desire this freedom in the main for three reasons. It will strengthen our hands in any negotiations by which we may hope to lower foreign hostile tariffs. It may enable us to protect the fiscal independence of those colonies which desire to give us preferential treatment. It may be useful when we wish to check the importation of those foreign goods which, because they are bounty-fed or tariff-protected *abroad*, are sold below cost price *here*. Such importations are ultimately as injurious to the British consumer as they are immediately disastrous to the British producer. Secondly, I desire closer commercial union with the colonies, and I do so because I desire closer union in all its best modes, and because this particular mode is intrinsically of great importance and has received much colonial support I also think it might

produce great and growing commercial advantages, both to the Colonies and the Mother Country, by promoting freer trade between them. No doubt such commercial union is beset with many difficulties. These can best be dealt with by a Colonial Conference, provided its members are permitted to discuss them unhampered by limiting instructions. Thirdly, I recommend, therefore, that the subject should be referred to a Conference on those terms. Fourth, and last, I do *not* desire to raise home prices for the purpose of aiding home production.'

The only effect of this pronouncement, however, was to stimulate anew those who had devoted themselves to the higher criticism of Mr Balfour. The Duke of Devonshire could 'find no policy in it at all'; the Radical Free Traders claimed that Mr Balfour and Mr Chamberlain were practically agreed; the Tariff Reformers, caring nothing about pious expressions of opinion, merely wanted to know, not what Mr Balfour thought, but what he was going to do. Mr Balfour now hit on a new device. He declined to take part in fiscal debates in Parliament, and permitted the Free Traders to pass what resolutions they liked in his absence. The opposition, thus put in the position of beating the air, furiously condemned the Prime Minister for 'degrading the constitution,' mocking the authority and flouting the dignity of the House, and making a 'miserable exhibition of cowardice and insincerity.' Mr Chamberlain himself described Mr Balfour's tactics as 'humiliating,' and as the year wore on showed more and more impatience.

At last, in November, speaking in his own principality of Birmingham, he put on pressure for a dissolution. 'The election continually recedes

into the background,' he said. 'I wish an election.' Lord Londonderry had attacked him a day or two before, and he now replied vigorously at the expense of 'the weaker brethren—the brethren who have no beliefs to speak of, or have been persuaded not to believe them too hard. They have always gone to the wall. I will not pretend to you that I am sorry. I will not pretend to you that I pity them.' 'The issues,' he went on, 'are too important to be minimised or concealed. We will do our best to make them clear. We will win our victory if we can. We will accept our beating, if we are beaten, with the determination to fight again.'

'I was not afraid of the Opposition; I was afraid of my friends,' said Mr Balfour a few days later, at Newcastle, in pleading for a moderate policy that should be unanimously accepted. Mr Chamberlain's retort was severe. He protested that the majority, be it nine-tenths, or, as he thought, ninety-nine-hundredths, could not be asked to sacrifice its convictions to the prejudice of the minority. 'No army,' he went on, 'was ever led successfully to battle on the principle that the lamest man should govern its march. I say you must not go into the battle which is impending with blunted swords merely in order to satisfy the scruples of those who do not wish to fight at all.'

This speech determined the event. A little more lingering, and it was clear that the Unionist party would have gone to the polls with a quarrel between the leaders as well as deep-seated division in its ranks. On December 4 Mr Balfour resigned. The choice of resignation rather than dissolution was prompted by tactical considerations. Dissolution would have give the Opposition the advantages of attack; resignation threw on it the embarrassment of defence.

Indeed, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's difficulties were not inconsiderable, and were at one time considered so grave that a design was conceived of ousting him from the leadership which he had sustained in the days of adversity. The sturdy Scot, however, had both principle and courage, and with most impressive ease he brushed aside Lord Rosebery, conquered the scruples or tempted the ambitions of the Liberal Imperialists, and formed a Cabinet of considerable distinction, in which Whiggish and Radical Imperialist and Little Englander elements were picturesquely combined.

Mr Balfour, helped by the Prime Minister's declarations, raised the issue of Home Rule. But the Irish question had only the smallest influence in the election of January, 1906. It was long since Ireland had occupied the centre of the political stage, and but for an incident hardly noticed in the heat of the Tariff controversy Home Rule might well have seemed to be no longer a living issue. That incident, not excessively important in itself, but curiously interesting as illustrating a side of Mr Balfour's character, may appropriately be recalled at this stage.

CHAPTER XIII

'Mr Balfour's charm,' wrote a partial but discriminating critic, 'certainly does not consist in anything approaching indiscriminate geniality, or in any conscious efforts to attract others to him. The circle of friends whom he admits to his confidence is not large, though his intellectual hospitality is unstinted and is extended to all genuine inquirers. His colleagues obtain from him not merely the most chivalrous support in public, but—a far rarer thing—the intimate loyalty of his thought. For them his acute mind holds a general retainer for the defence.'

This is no doubt true, but subject to a certain qualification. On occasion Mr Balfour has found it necessary to make heavy sacrifices of his own to political expediency, and it is only natural that sometimes the same Moloch should successfully demand of him the surrender of a friend. 'Arthur,' said no less a judge than Mr Winston Churchill, 'is in his nature hard; he could be cruel. I call him wicked. . . . The difference between him (Mr Asquith) and Arthur is that Arthur is wicked and moral, Asquith is good and immoral.'[1] In such exaggeration there is a germ of truth. Mr Balfour is hard in the sense that so many men of high superiority are hard. If it is true that no sparrow falls without the divine knowledge and assent, it is also true that many sparrows fall without the smallest observable effect on the general scheme of Providence; and every great man

[1] 'My Diaries' of Wilfred Scawen Blunt.

tends (and must tend) to indifference as to what happens to the little men who are of use to-day and of no use to-morrow. Mr Balfour's 'chivalrous support' and 'intimate loyalty of thought' were assuredly not lacking to any subordinate who found himself in a temporarily awkward situation; he has shown all the traditionary Conservative tendency to remember friends, and much of the specially Cecilian tendency not to forget relatives; but let friend or relative become a real embarrassment, and nobody could be more passively reconciled (or in extreme cases more actively contributory) to their elimination. Thus cousinship did not save Lord Hugh and Lord Robert Cecil from proscription as Free Trade irreconcilables; thus the firmest ties of political intimacy and personal friendship did not secure Mr George Wyndham from ruin.

The story of George Wyndham is not a little pathetic. Handsome, high-spirited, generous, gifted with all the graces and many of the talents, from the drabness of the Treasury Bench his personality stood out with rare and gracious emphasis. His entrance into the Cabinet in 1902 as Chief Secretary for Ireland afforded the happiest promise both for his own personal career and for the future of that country. There was an infectious buoyancy, a high and genial spirit in George Wyndham that drew out the best from the men associated with him, whether in politics or in the literary undertakings which interested him scarcely less. This disposition chanced happily to find peculiar opportunities in the complexion of the Irish administration of this time. Lord Dudley had been appointed Viceroy, and Sir Anthony MacDonnell, a Roman Catholic, was Under-Secretary at Dublin Castle. A few months after Mr Wyndham's appointment, a certain Captain

Shawe Taylor proposed a meeting of landlords' and tenants' representatives to concert measures for an agreed policy on land. The Orangemen held aloof, but Lord Dunraven and other southern landlords accepted the invitation; Mr William O'Brien and other Nationalists were enthusiastic; a conference was held; and out of it grew the great Land Purchase Act associated imperishably with Mr Wyndham's name—a measure by which nearly a quarter of a million occupiers bought their holdings. There was a desperate fight to get the Bill approved in the Cabinet; Mr Chamberlain, the Duke of Devonshire, Lord Lansdowne, and Lord Londonderry were against it, and only the support of Mr Balfour, who was heart and soul with his lieutenant, carried the day.

The Land Conference survived the attainment of its immediate object, and became the Irish Reform Association. In the early autumn of 1904 rumours which had long been current that Mr Wyndham had been converted to Home Rule—he admitted to a friend that he was 'theoretically' a Home Ruler—seemed to have obtained corroboration by talk of a new policy of 'Devolution,' evolved by Lord Dunraven's association. It could not be denied that such a policy had been elaborated; it could not be denied that Sir Anthony MacDonnell was a Roman Catholic and something like a Home Ruler; and though Mr Wyndham hastened to declare that the scheme had not been adopted, and that parts of it, at least, were impracticable, the watchful suspicion of Ulster could not be quieted. At Lurgan (a town which had presented him with a big drum) Colonel Saunderson, one of the Ulster stalwarts, declared on 'irrefutable authority' that Sir Anthony had drawn up the Devolution scheme 'under the direct orders

of Mr Wyndham.' The 'irrefutable authority' was refuted by Mr Wyndham himself, and the charge was softened to 'connivance rather than initiation.' But the grievance remained; Mr Wyndham had touched the unclean thing, and his relations with a wing at least of the Nationalist party had been criminally cordial.

There were other irregularities at the charge of the Chief Secretary and Dublin Castle. A Protestant policeman was said to have been 'victimised' for paying attentions to a Roman Catholic girl, which caused a cry that the 'Inquisition' had been set up. Nuns had been appointed to duties in an infirmary workhouse. It so happened about the same time that the Bann River was indiscreet enough to flood the houses of several Protestants. Worse than all, Lord Dunraven, in conjunction with Mr Wyndham and Dr Mahaffy, had mapped out a scheme for a great Irish University. Lord Londonderry, in his dual position of President of the Board of Education and Ulster leader, was able to state that the Government had no intention of adopting the scheme, but it was enough that such a design had been entertained. Mr Wyndham was suspect, to say the least, of attempting peace with rebellious Ireland at the cost, as Colonel Saunderson put it, of 'those who are loyal.'

Mr Balfour first held his peace during this controversy; then he defended Mr Wyndham while keeping silence about his reputed policy; but when Mr Wyndham in March, 1905, felt himself forced to resign, the resignation was accepted—with resignation. Mr Wyndham sacrificed himself to the party Moloch; Mr Balfour accepted the sacrifice. The general situtation was difficult enough without the added trouble; and if the trouble could be avoided by the disappearance of Mr Wyndham, the one Tory

who seemed qualified to be his successor, was it worth while taking a considerable risk? Mr Wyndham could no doubt have saved himself by throwing over Sir Anthony MacDonnell and going back on the attitude which had won him so much goodwill in Ireland. He could, perhaps, have been saved had Mr Balfour declared outright that the time had come for a genuine settlement of the Irish question. Mr Wyndham would not take the one step; Mr Balfour would not or could not take the other. So a propitious moment passed; there has only been another equally hopeful, and that too was wasted. Two moderate parties had appeared in Ireland. Lord Londonderry, usually rigid, had eloquently defended Mr Wyndham. The Nationalists were in a melting mood. Only extreme Orangemen and an inconsiderable section of Nationalists were averse from reconciliation. A few words from Mr Balfour at this stage might have meant much. But they were not spoken, and George Wyndham went into retirement.

Mr Balfour gave little opening for criticism in his announcement of the resignation. 'The Chief Secretary,' he said, 'believed that the controversy which had taken place had greatly impaired, if not wholly destroyed, the value of the work which he had to do.' On the merits of the case, he said, he would say nothing, although, he added, there were parts of it on which he held very strong opinions. A little later he was less enigmatic. Devolution he declared more dangerous, because more insidious, than Home Rule; it was a 'step towards breaking up the United Kingdom.' It is true that we often realise the full extent of a terrible danger only when it has passed; but that fact, perhaps, inadequately reconciles Mr Balfour's leniency to Devolution in the nurseling

stage with the austerity of his attitude over its untimely coffin. 'George has been several times,' writes the diarist already cited a few months after Mr Wyndham's resignation, 'and has explained to me all his Irish story. He has sacrificed himself to party necessities and his devotion to Arthur Balfour.' A little later the same commentator observes, 'Arthur has gone right round to the extremists again—coercion and all the rest, with Walter Long as his prophet.'

Mr Wyndham's short official career was not beneficial solely to Ireland. He was one of the very few Ministers whose foresight urged, on a rather reluctant majority, the conclusion of the Anglo-French Entente.

CHAPTER XIV

Mr Balfour's defeat in East Manchester, which he had represented since 1885, was announced on the first day of polling; it was an omen of the disaster which every succeeding day only served to emphasise. Six members of the late Government shared his fate; and when such heads as remained unbroken were counted the opposition was found to number only 157, divided fiscally thus: 102 Chamberlainites, 36 followers of Mr Balfour, 16 Unionist Free Traders, and three 'incapable of classification.' The Liberal majority over all sections was 124. One of the great contributory causes to the defeat was undoubtedly the agitation against the importation of Chinese Labour in South Africa, a subject on which Mr Balfour (less cautious in this respect than Mr Chamberlain) had adopted a rather flippant attitude, scoffing at Opposition protests as if they merely represented party claptrap or idle sentimentalism. But, genuine as was feeling in this matter, especially among Labour voters, the verdict could only be accepted, in the main, as a condemnation of both fiscal policies, Mr Balfour's equally with Mr Chamberlain's.

The comparative success of Mr Chamberlain, indeed, suggested at once to the Tariff Reformers that, while there was hope for the strong brew, the small beer had no sort of chance; and it was taken for granted in many quarters that there must be a change of leadership. Mr Chamberlain himself seems to have momentarily inclined to that view, but only momentarily. After all it was a most serious matter to break with the possessor, not only of the finest

brain in politics, but of the party organisation—to break, also, not on any great difference of principle (for Mr Balfour had by this time made it abundantly clear that he was a Tariff Reformer of some kind) but on questions of tactics and expediency. Mr Chamberlain had to choose between two evils, as they might well appear to him: a disastrous split, on the one hand; a certain drag on the Tariff Reform wheel on the other. He chose the latter; and the so-called Valentine letters, published on February 14, 1906, established a new concordat between the Balfourites and the Birmingham party.

Mr Balfour's letter described Tariff Reform as the 'first constructive work of the Unionist party.' Its objects were to secure 'more equal terms of competition for British trade' and 'closer commercial union with the Colonies.' These objects might be brought about by the establishment of a moderate general Tariff on manufactured goods, not imposed for the purpose of raising prices or giving artificial protection against legitimate competition, and by the imposition of a small duty on foreign corn. Such steps, Mr Balfour declared, were, in the opinion of the great majority of the party, 'not in principle objectionable, and should be adopted if *shown to be necessary* for the object in view or for the purpose of revenue.' The policy thus defined was accepted and 'cordially welcomed' by Mr Chamberlain, though, with its qualification, it really meant no more than any previous utterance from the same quarter. It left Mr Balfour free, as before, to hoist the Tariff Reform sail if there happened to be a favouring breeze, or to reef it if the wind blew adversely. The effect of the Valentine letter, indeed, was to confirm Mr Balfour in the leadership of the whole party, but in nowise to give any section of it

more control over him than any party has ultimately over its leader.

Of this advantage Mr Balfour made the adroitest use. There has never been so remarkable a recovery. When, after the Manchester defeat, he entered the House of Commons as member for the City of London, he found his own side of the House gloomy and suspicious, and the Ministerial Benches acidly and ungenerously contemptuous. The number of new members was very large, and he had almost to remake his reputation. Mr Balfour had, as usual, taken very coolly his personal rebuff at Manchester; he played an excellent game of golf the next day. Nor did he harbour the smallest resentment against Mr (now Mr Justice) Horridge, who had ousted him. In fact, he carried indifference so far as to forget the very appearance of his opponent. An undistinguished winner of a notable election can seldom resist (until the House has duly signified its feelings) the natural tendency to consider himself a very important personage, and this self-indulgence usually takes the form of speaking whenever possible. Mr Horridge was no exception to the rule. He was addressing the House with much energy when Mr Balfour came in. 'Who is that?' asked Mr Balfour, after using his pince-nez. 'He seems to be on very excellent terms with himself.' 'He may well be,' replied the Colonial Secretary, 'since he had the honour of beating you at Manchester.' 'Dear me,' was the comment, 'how very interesting.' But though Mr Balfour remained the philosopher he could not be unaffected by the changed atmosphere. At first he fumbled a little, and he was almost cowed when Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman dismissed one of his fine-drawn debating points with the brutally direct exclamation, 'Enough of this foolery.'

But a few weeks sufficed to restore Mr Balfour's old ascendancy, and perhaps even to increase it. For Mr Chamberlain was, unhappily, suffering not only from the late rebuff, but from the advances of the physical trouble which was so soon to compel his renunciation of active political life, and apart from Mr Chamberlain there was nobody fit to tie the shoe-lace of Mr Balfour. The Unionist Benches were notably barren of distinction; and the extraordinary effect of the maiden speech of Mr F. E. Smith, which could only have been produced *in vacuo*, was sufficiently symptomatic of this intellectual destitution. For a leader who had conducted his party to unparalleled defeat, for one whose special following was the smallest in the House, Mr Balfour enjoyed, in the Parliament of 1906-10, quite extraordinary prestige and authority.

In such circumstances, he first set out to enjoy a long fiscal vacation. On every other subject he was active, pertinacious, and effective; on Tariff Reform he was silent for a whole year, while the stalwarts of that policy glowered at him with suspicious eyes, and the persecuted Free Fooders pathetically sought his countenance in vain. At Hull early in 1907 he made gay play with the reviving discontent. Could he be expected to issue monthly bulletins, he asked, as to the state of his mind on Tariff Reform? His beliefs remained constant, and did not require perpetual amplification. He advised his followers not to become a 'party of one idea,' and not to make Tariff Reform 'a test of party loyalty.' Having thus rebuked the malcontents, he developed with great skill an argument which seemed to justify his attitude. He urged the necessity, quite apart from any special fiscal gospel, of 'broadening the basis of taxation.' Tariff Reform, it seemed, must come

by force of circumstances; more money had to be found for social reform; the existing sources of taxation had pretty well reached their limit; what resource was there but 'broadening the basis'—which meant Tariff Reform? The Government, whether they liked it or not, must impose duties on a variety of things now held sacred, and thus the desired policy would be brought about insensibly by the mere operation of natural causes. The argument was repeated by all the Tariff Reform speakers, who seemed to fail to see that it tended to damp down propagandist ardour—which was precisely Mr Balfour's object.

With the same skill the Unionist leader used the Imperial Conference of 1907. He was immensely severe on the 'poor figure' cut by a Little England Ministry in the presence of Imperial Statesmen, talked of 'Free Trade within the Empire,' and castigated Mr Churchill for 'banging, barring, and bolting the door' against Preference. But he would give no details 'years ahead' of his own policy, and refused to exercise a 'tyrannical jurisdiction' over the fiscal beliefs of members of his party. Tariff Reformers might have their doubts in private, but they were not sufficiently agile for this particular game of 'hunt the leader.'

In 1908 Mr Balfour, however, seemed to conceive that the time for Tariff Reform had really arrived. Mr Asquith, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, had provided for old-age pensions which were to come into operation the next year; Mr Lloyd George was meditating a great 'social reform' Budget; Lord Rosebery was talking about Socialism as 'the end of everything—the death-blow to all'; trade was depressed; election after election was lost to the Government. Mr Balfour, in November, made a

speech without reserve or qualification; he waxed enthusiastic in praise of the policy. It was 'no remote ideal, no distant prospect.' Everything was driving us to the great change. 'The time, I say, is coming when that great policy will be turned from an ardent hope into a practical reality; every man now knows in his heart that the momentous epoch is approaching, that the first breath of the new era is making itself felt, that the dawn of the new day is already visible on the horizon.' A few months later, just before the introduction of the famous Budget of 1909, Mr Balfour was even more confident. The whole dogmatic case for Free Trade as Cobden conceived it was, he said, gone; the old system must be changed; 'changes are bound to come.' Mr Bonar Law, calculating on 'two bad winters' was a pessimist compared with Mr Balfour, with his 'dawn of a new day' already visible.

There was reason for this jubilant note. The Government was no longer popular. Its sincerity had been impugned by its failure to deal drastically with the Chinese labour question; its Education Bill had antagonised the Church, its Licensing Bill the Trade; Lord Tweedmouth's discussion of Navy Estimates with the Kaiser had disgusted some people, Mr Haldane's volubility had wearied others; the advocates of Woman's Suffrage, feeling with some justice that they had been shabbily treated by a Parliament with an immense majority pledged to their cause, had thrown their not inconsiderable influence against the Ministry; above all there was the fear of 'Socialism.' The man of substance who was also a Free Trader was extended on the horns of a hideous dilemma. He might fear Tariff Reform, but he feared 'Socialism' much more, and constant Labour disputes, almost invariably settled by

concession, led him to infer an inevitable association between industrial trouble and Radical rule. Damaging revelations of working-class corruption and extravagance in London local administration added, not unnaturally, to the general distrust. Meanwhile the Tariff Reformers had perfected their organisation; heresy was relentlessly hunted out by a body called the Confederates; there was very 'big money' behind the movement, and boundless enthusiasm. Electioneering was developed as never before; and the enormous expense of conducting a campaign on the new lines, with the gramophone, the cinematograph, and 'object lessons,' was a considerable advantage to what, on the whole, was the richer party.

In his over-confidence Mr Balfour made one considerable mistake. He had killed two Education Bills through the House of Lords, which was his instrument for ensuring that the Unionist party should 'control, in opposition as well as in power, the destinies of this country.' This was certainly no considerable tactical error; all possible damage as far as concerned Liberal Unionist Nonconformists was done in 1902, and the action of the Lords created few new enemies. But a different matter was the decision of the Peers (at a meeting at Lord Lansdowne's private residence in Berkeley Square) to reject the Licensing Bill without going through the form of amending it. The Bill cut across strictly party lines; the Bishops supported it, and many Unionists felt with the Bishops that, though the Bill might be too drastic, the case was one for reasoned amendment and not for slaughter. The rejection, and especially the manner of it, nettled the whole Liberal party, and nerved it for a great effort; it offended many outside that party; and it left the

House of Lords, on the eve of a considerable Constitutional struggle, in a position of impaired moral authority.

Had Mr Balfour known a little more of the feelings of very ordinary men he would have been saved this error of judgment. Not for the first time or the last in his life he overdid things through simple ignorance of the sensitiveness of the populace where it suspects any breach of the English tradition of fair-play.

CHAPTER XV

In the Spring of 1909 the fortunes of the Liberal Government seemed to have reached their lowest ebb, and competent judges held that the feeling of the country was now predominantly Unionist. There had been a quite genuine Navy scare, and the Government had had to confess to grave miscalculations as to the rate of the building of capital ships in Germany. It was under the shadow of this exposure, and with the added burden of greatly swollen Naval estimates, that Mr Lloyd George introduced his Budget on the last day of April.

It is unnecessary here to recall the provisions of what Mr Balfour's fellow-member for the City of London,[1] described off-hand as 'the maddest Budget ever introduced.' The country has since had experience of really 'confiscatory taxation,' and in re-reading the debates of the time one is chiefly puzzled to guess why substantial people in the House of Commons, in the City of London, and in the country agreed suddenly to go off their heads—why, for example, Lord Rosebery should be talking about 'revolution' and 'Socialism: the end of all—the negation of faith, of family, of property, of monarchy, of Empire.' One could understand Mr Balfour—disappointed that the Government had not been obliging enough to 'broaden the basis,' as he had suggested—describing the 'Budget speech as an 'electioneering manifesto,' as 'absolutely grotesque,' as 'not only grossly unfair but quite unworkable.' Such criticism is common form. But the wave of fury which swept over the country after

[1] Sir Frederick Banbury.

Mr Lloyd George's declaration of his intention to 'wage implacable warfare on poverty' is only explicable on the assumption that wealthy people were more afraid of what he might do some day than of his actually modest proposals. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, of course, contributed to popular delusion by language which would have been considered a trifle extravagant in 1793. But when all allowances are made the Budget delirium of 1909 remains as much a psychological puzzle as the Titus Oates or South Sea Bubble fevers.

The peculiar talents of Mr Balfour were not specially suited to the curious situation produced by this outburst of frenzy, and he was curiously silent during the summer of 1909. Indeed the Unionist leadership seemed almost to be put in commission. For the second time Mr Balfour was overwhelmed by a torrent, released by himself, which he was unable to control. Had he been master of events he would probably have offered in the House of Commons every possible resistance to the Budget, but would have refrained from giving the signal for destruction to the House of Lords. All his instincts and traditions were against such a step. He had, two years before, declared that the Upper House 'could not touch Money Bills' and that the House of Commons 'settles uncontrolled our financial system.' During the early summer of 1909 he adhered to that view. But the question was not to be decided by his cool intelligence. Lord Milner, suddenly emerging from pensioned retirement, gave force and coherence to all the murmurs that had been heard from the first in Tariff Reform circles to the effect that the Budget must be defeated at all hazards, if not by the House of Commons, then by the House of Lords. To those who, while willing to wound, were afraid to strike, Lord

Milner simply answered 'damn the consequences'; and, thus emboldened by the recklessness of a sage, all that was influential in Conservatism clamoured in favour of forcing an election, and so carrying at a bound the object of their desire. Mr Chamberlain, from his enforced seclusion, wrote that he hoped the House of Lords would 'see their way' to bring about the desired consummation; Mr Balfour gave his concurrence; and at the end of November, after the decent formality of a full-dress debate, the Peers in their hundreds flocked into the 'Not Content' Lobby. For the first time in Parliamentary history, the rights of the elective chamber over the Supply of the Crown had been challenged.

It must have cost Mr Balfour a pang, with his training and tradition, to countenance so essentially revolutionary a course. But there was really no choice in the matter; it was a case, to quote Mr Bonar Law on a subsequent occasion, of 'I must follow them; I am their leader.' From the introduction of the Budget one idea possessed the Tariff Reformers who now ruled the party; they believed that its defeat was the only alternative to their own; and, free from the scruples which influenced Mr Chamberlain while he was still their active leader, they were quite prepared to sacrifice Mr Balfour should he show any disposition to lead them away from the steep places of their desire.

Having committed himself, Mr Balfour, as was his way, stuck at nothing. He warmly commended the action of the Lords, talked much about a 'single chamber conspiracy,' defined the issue as between Socialism and Tariff Reform, spoke lovingly of the latter as 'the first plank in the Unionist programme,' and finally gave (in conjunction with Mr Chamberlain) a 'personal pledge' that the working man's budget

should not be increased as the result of the policy. The Tariff Reformers had calculated on a sweeping victory; why is not a little obscure. It might not be thought that the working-man, who had already gained much cash and privilege by his vote, would be specially anxious to make that vote of little or no value by weakening the House of Commons and placing the non-elective chamber in possession of the chief power in the State. But the whole Tariff Reform movement illustrated the triumph of hope over experience, and its leaders were fully persuaded that the 'constitutional issue' had no reality in the eyes of the masses.

The disappointment was severe; though the Government majority was greatly reduced, it remained considerable; and with the Irish vote again a balancing factor, Home Rule once more entered the region of 'practical politics.' But for the present the constitutional question overshadowed all others. Mr Balfour began to talk, much to the disgust of the Tariff Reformers, not about their pet subject, but about the dark designs of a 'frankly revolutionary Government.' This dangerous gang of conspirators began sedately enough with the usual constitutional solemnities, and had not got to grips with the main problem when the King's death interrupted everything. Respect for the late Sovereign, together with the necessity of passing a mass of emergency legislation in relation to the demise of the Crown, imposed an awkward armistice which could hardly, in the nature of things, be followed by a peace. A conference between party leaders, of which Mr Balfour of course was a principal member, was set up, and lasted till November, when it was dissolved *re infectâ*.

Meanwhile the House of Lords had been engaged, singularly enough, in considering measures for its

own transformation. During the Budget controversy the House had been described by its friends as an institution as nearly perfect as any human contrivance could be; it now passed a resolution to the effect that 'the possession of a peerage should no longer of itself give the right to sit and vote.' This admission of the unfitness of the Peers (as then constituted) not only to do what they had done, but to perform any of the ordinary functions of a Second Chamber, was of course not meant as such. The Motion was not at all, as Lord Curzon stated it, 'a voluntary act of self-renunciation without parallel.' Its aim was to form an inner House of Lords which could not be affected by the creation of Peers, and would, therefore, already possessing the veto on legislation, become practically all-powerful. This was put into fairly plain English by Mr Balfour. 'You must strengthen the House of Lords,' he said, 'not with the view of modifying the policy it has hitherto adopted, but with the view of enabling it more effectively to carry out its duties'—those duties being, of course, to check the House of Commons whenever people unpleasing to the Peers happened to be in the majority.

When a second dissolution was announced, Lord Lansdowne was still intent on his plans of reform. The fact is chiefly memorable because out of these discussions arose one of the most singular examples of the Unionist tendency at this time to seize on anything, regardless of its remoter implications, which promised a temporary advantage. Lord Lansdowne, elaborating machinery for the adjustment of disputes between the two Houses, had proposed that 'very grave differences' should not be considered (as in the case of 'minor matters') at a joint session of both houses, but should be 'submitted to the

electors by Referendum.' This policy was rather incautiously approved—incaution is the note of the whole time—by the Tariff Reform leaders, who little thought of the use that was to be made of it. The Liberals were at once challenged to submit Home Rule to a Referendum, and their objection to this ultra-democratic device doubled the sudden enthusiasm which had seized the other party.

It was in these circumstances that Mr Balfour, who had recently recovered his full enthusiasm for Tariff Reform, and had again 'pledged' himself that dearer bread (if it must indeed be dearer) should not 'increase the cost of living to the working-man,' addressed on November 29 a great meeting at the Albert Hall. He dealt largely with the Referendum, making great fun of the 'horrible embarrassment' of the Liberals, who for party reasons had to reject a method adopted by the purest democracies of the world: a cheap method (costing less than £200,000), a method which gave a clear issue, and one that avoided the disturbance of a general election. That, said Mr Balfour, showed a fear of democracy; the Liberals disliked any plan which made the people arbiters on a clear and single issue. Mr Asquith had asked him whether, since he favoured the Referendum, he would submit Tariff Reform to the Referendum.

'They think,' continued Mr Balfour, 'that they have put me in a hole by that question. But they haven't. . . . I frankly say that without question Tariff Reform is a great change. I admit that this election, or any election perhaps—certainly this election—cannot be described as taken on Tariff Reform simply, and I have not the least objection to submit the principles of Tariff Reform to a Referendum.'

There was extraordinary enthusiasm, and a cry 'That's won the election.' It did not. It did not

even win Lancashire. The Asquith Government came back—some wondered why it had gone out—in almost exactly the same strength as before. The party to be 'horribly embarrassed' was the party of Tariff Reform, which now saw in Mr Balfour's inspiration one more attempt to transport the policy to a political Botany Bay. They could hardly protest vocally for the moment, because they had been carried off their feet when Mr Balfour made his declaration, and had approved it as 'a great lead.' But murmurs soon began to be heard after the defeat at the polls—the third under Mr Balfour's leadership. There was talk about getting rid at once of the burden of the Referendum, and, though this course was not adopted forthwith, the fact that it was found desirable to issue a statement that 'the notion that Tariff Reform is shelved was originally started by the Liberals,' showed pretty plainly that there had been something in the nature of a mutiny.

The situation was, in fact, much like that on the ship which carried Jack Hawkins to Treasure Island. The impatient mutineers wanted blood at once. But some cunning John Silver pointed out that there was some difficult navigation ahead, that the captain was, after all, the best seaman on board, and that the time to cut his throat was not now, but after he had brought the ship within sight of land. The reasoning was too sound to be rejected. But the mutineers, like those on board the *Esmeralda*, could not refrain from showing their feelings by the circulation of the 'Black Spot,' and the mystic letters, 'B. M. G.'—'Balfour must go'—began to circulate like a Jacobite password. As for the skipper, he, like Captain Tobias Smollett, knew a good deal of what was going on, but preferred to say nothing, and pretend that all was well.

CHAPTER XVI

THOUGH unsuccessful, Mr Balfour's last fight as leader of the Unionist party was perhaps the most brilliant performance of a brilliant career. Even the Irish days afford no such sustained display of dexterity and resource. He had, indeed, every motive to put forth his last effort. For certainly his leadership, possibly more important things, depended on the issue. If he could extricate his followers from the 'damned consequences,' all might still be well; if he failed, there were snickersnees already sharpening for the last scene.

The prospect was bleak, but by no means hopeless. The year before Mr Asquith had bitterly disappointed and profoundly disheartened his followers. They went into the Budget election in the belief that, if they won it, the opposition of the House of Lords to its virtual destruction would be overwhelmed by the creation of *ad hoc* Peers. They believed, further, that Mr Asquith, before dissolving, had obtained assurances to that effect from King Edward. But almost as soon as the new Parliament met Mr Asquith declared that he had no such assurances, and that it would have been improper to seek them. Indeed the whole tone of the Government, for a body supposed to be engaged in a revolution, was encouragingly or disquietingly decorous, according to the point of view. It was not unnatural that Mr Balfour should count on 1911 being a repetition, on a somewhat more strenuous scale, of the futility of 1910. In a game of bluff he could

place dependence on his own talents, and the probabilities seemed to point to such a game. The fight of 1911 is, therefore, to be regarded mainly as an exhibition of tactics; if we search the Hansard of the period for traces of statesmanship the enterprise will be singularly barren of results, but if we think of the fight as simply one for the avoidance or mitigation of penalties in a prolonged game of double and quits, the skill and courage of the chief performer must provoke admiration.

Mr Balfour's general plan was a delaying action in the centre, a demonstration on the left wing, and an attempt at envelopment on the right. In other words, while fighting the Parliament Bill with every resource of the art of Parliamentary obstruction, he endeavoured to work round the Government's flank by putting forward counter-proposals for the reform of the House of Lords, while he meanwhile harassed Ministers with a brisk fire of side issues, of which the chief was the Reciprocity Agreement between Canada and the United States. This particular demonstration has no great interest in retrospect, but it was skilfully used by Mr Balfour for two purposes—to discredit the Government in the eyes of the country, as having driven Canada by its Free Trade purism into the arms of the United States, and to mesmerise the Tariff Reform extremists who more than suspected him of being half-hearted in the cause.

Accordingly for some months Mr Balfour was more royalist than the King; not even in 1908 was he more eloquent in praise of Preference than when Preference was presumed to be doomed by this suggested bargain with the United States. This agitation almost exactly synchronised with the Parliament Bill struggle; the ultimate outcome was

that Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the Canadian Prime Minister, finding great opposition, decided to dissolve Parliament, was defeated, and resigned, the Reciprocity Agreement falling with him. The discussions in this country during the spring and summer illustrated the dangers of interference in the affairs of the self-governing Dominions. It was scarcely possible for an enthusiastic Tariff Reformer or Free Trader in Great Britain to avoid an indictment of the opposite party in Canada. Thus Sir Wilfrid Laurier was condemned as anti-Imperial, anti-British, and pro-American, while his antagonist, Mr (afterwards Sir Robert) Borden, might well be led to believe that the party then governing Great Britain was perfectly indifferent as to Canada's future. But, objectionable as the debate might be from this wider standpoint, it was exceedingly convenient to Mr Balfour as a weapon in his fight with the Government.

The House of Lords' counter-offensive was a more important element in the struggle. It was an attempt to convince the country that there was no necessity whatever for the Government to proceed with the Parliament Bill. 'Why'—such was in effect the appeal to popular opinion of Lord Lansdowne's House of Lords Reconstruction Bill—'why resort to unheard of and unconstitutional measures to do what we are perfectly ready to accomplish of our own free-will? Reform of the House of Lords—certainly it wants reform, and we propose to bring it into perfect harmony with democratic sentiment. The Government wants revolution; we propose evolution.' A year before the Peers had approved the principle that a peerage should not necessarily entitle the owner to a seat in the House of Lords. Lord Lansdowne now brought forward a Bill to constitute an Upper Chamber which, 'while

faithfully serving the democracy, would be strong enough to resist the gusts of passion and prejudice.' There were to be a hundred 'Lords of Parliament' elected by the hereditary Peers from such Peers as had held office, civil or military, from ex-Ambassadors and ex-Viceroys to generals, admirals, and lords-lieutenant. There were to be 120 Lords of Parliament chosen by 'electoral colleges' consisting of Members of Parliament. One hundred were further to be appointed by the Crown—which, of course, meant by the Prime Minister—in proportion to the strength of parties in the House of Commons; and there were the Spiritual Lords and the Law Lords. Mixed up with the scheme was the institution of the Referendum. For 'minor differences' between the two House joint sittings were provided; 'great matters' were to be made the subject of a Referendum. The real meaning of the proposals was this. In the first place a permanent Conservative majority in the Upper House was guaranteed. In the second, that majority could not possibly be affected (as in the last resort hitherto) by the free creation of Peers.

This singular measure, which no doubt derived largely from Mr Balfour, duly received his blessing. 'Lord Lansdowne,' he said at Newcastle, 'has begun at the right end.' He could not see that the 'broad system' of the House of Commons was susceptible of improvement, but he thought the country wanted a stronger second Chamber. The Bill had a sullen reception on its introduction; the *morituri* could hardly be so blithe as the Cæsar who was about to send them to death. The situation rather resembled that hit off in one of the most famous cartoons of the period of the first French revolution. A Minister submitting unwelcome taxation proposals was portrayed as a peasant calling the poultry yard together

and consulting the members how they should be cooked. 'But we don't want to be cooked,' was the unanimous protest. 'Ah, there,' replied the peasant, 'you wander from the point.' The Peers, during the second reading debate, wandered deplorably from the point. They most inconveniently concurred with Lord Lansdowne when, referring to the painful nature of his task, he said that to some 'these proposals will almost present the appearance of a betrayal.' The previous year Lord Newton had declared: 'The melancholy fact is—a lot of us will have to go.' But who was to go? On this point there ensued a contest like that between the cook and the seaman in *The Yarn of the 'Nancy Bell'*:—

> Then only the cook and me was left,
> And the delicate question which
> Of us goes to the kettle arose,
> And we argued it out as sich:
>
> For I loved that cook as a brother, I did,
> And the cook he worshipped me;
> But we'd both be blowed if we'd either
> be stowed
> In the other chap's hold, d'ye see?

Lords Lansdowne, Curzon, Selborne, and Milner naturally considered that the victims should be what were then called the 'backwoodsmen': Peers, that is to say, who lived mainly on their estates, and thought none the worse of themselves for that. The 'backwoodsmen,' on their side, began angrily to inquire why they should be sacrificed, they of old creation and proud lineage, for the convenience of Lord Lansdowne and his colleagues, some of them unheard of the day before yesterday. If we are to

die, they said, let us die like men at the hands of the enemy, and not, like suicide felons in their cells, at our own. One Peer summed up the whole thing when he said: 'Though I have the strongest possible objection to being executed, if necessary I shall mount the tumbril with fortitude. But I shall not order it myself.' The Bill, and everything belonging to it, the Referendum included, was killed by the very human objection of the average lord to destroying himself politically. He might well prefer the chances of war to the certainties of the lethal chamber prepared by Lord Lansdowne, with the co-operation, countenance, and approval of Mr Balfour.

The wreckage of this scheme reduced the Opposition leader, in the main, to defensive tactics. The only chance now was to defeat the Parliament Bill. The preamble of that measure affirmed the necessity of a second chamber on a popular basis, but declared that the time was not yet opportune for such reform. Meanwhile, leaving the constitution of the House of Lords untouched, it proposed to abolish altogether the veto on Money Bills, and provided that any other Bills passed by the Commons in three successive sessions should have the power of law without the assent of the House of Lords. The duration of Parliament was reduced to five years.

Mr Balfour was quick in seizing the objectionable feature of this measure. It reduced the Upper House to a state of suspended animation, in which it has, in fact, since remained, despite Mr Asquith's declaration that reform, as apart from the abolition of the veto, 'brooked no delay.' If the balance of the Constitution was violently upset by the rejection of the Budget, equilibrium was not restored by the Government's Bill; and, whatever Mr Asquith might say, every indication pointed to the intention

of the Government to press through a mass of highly controversial legislation before proceeding with its plans for a reformed Second Chamber. The Liberals wanted, said Lord Hugh Cecil with point as well as wit, 'to make hay of the constitution while the declining sun of Liberalism still shone.' In opposing the Government's proposals, Mr Balfour showed an astonishing fertility of argument, and marvellous ingenuity in framing or inspiring objections in regard alike to principle and to detail. His command of every Parliamentary weapon was never more signally illustrated. But the Parliament Bill rumbled through the various stages with the slow certainty of a Juggernaut, and the result of nine hundred amendments moved in committee was practically to leave the measure unaltered.

On the second reading of the Bill in the House of Lords, on May 23, the Archbishop of Canterbury's appeal to the Government to take up a more conciliatory attitude was met, to adopt the epigram of Lord Rosebery, by 'wringing the dove's neck and serving it up on the olive branch.' The Government was, indeed, politely implacable, and Lord Lansdowne, admitting that after the last two elections it had a right to legislate, reserved to himself liberty to move amendments. The second reading passed with one dissentient voice, the Peers sought what comfort they could in their dignified participation in the festivities of the coronation. A month later they addressed themselves, with a skill induced by long practice, to the task of knocking the bottom out of the Bill—a labour as futile as grateful, since the Government (through Lord Morley) intimated that it would accept no material alteration. On the third reading, the philosophical Viscount declared that the consequences of adhering to amendments which

changed the character of the measure would be 'grave,' but expressed the hope that matters could be arranged without 'social shock.' The reference, of course, was to the one question in the general mind: did the Government intend, if necessary, to force the Bill through by the free creation of Peers? Lord Lansdowne's reply was even more significant than Lord Morley's warning. 'From some of the amendments,' he said, 'my friends and myself will not recede *so long as we are free agents*.' This expression, with its suggestion of submission to duress, was at once interpreted as the note of surrender answering the note of menace; and a very short time sufficed to establish the accuracy of the diagnosis. On the very day of the third reading Mr Asquith had written to Mr Balfour.

'Dear Mr Balfour,' he began, 'I think it is courteous and right, before any public decisions are announced, to let you know how we regard the political situation.' Then he went on to say that the Government would not accept the Lords' amendments. 'In the circumstances, should the necessity arise, the Government will advise the King to exercise his prerogative to secure the passing into law of the Bill in substantially the same form in which it left the House of Commons, and His Majesty has been pleased to signify that he will consider it his duty to accept and act on that advice.' The letter was subscribed 'Yours sincerely'; even in so formal and formidable a document the Prime Minister felt that it would be affectation to adopt a less familiar style to an opponent with whom he had been on the most friendly terms ever since the meetings of the 'Souls.'

The Prime Minister's announcement was dated July 20. The next day two meetings of the Unionist

party were held, that of the leaders in the Lords and Commons at Mr Balfour's town house, that of the Unionist Peers at Lord Lansdowne's. At once a fissure was evident. One section of the party still 'damned the consequences.' The other plaintively declared that the consequences were damned. The one called out that the Government should be compelled to make good its word, to create the Peers, and cause in both senses what Lord Morley had called 'social shock.' The other adopted the philosophy of cutting the losses. Lord Lansdowne led the 'Hedgers,' those who were for bowing to the inevitable; the defiers, or 'Ditchers,' those found a chief in the veteran Lord Halsbury, seventeen years Lord Chancellor. Broadly speaking, the 'Ditchers' were Tariff Reformers of the more pronounced type; the 'Hedgers' included many whom Mr Chamberlain had denounced as 'the weaker brethren.' The line of cleavage ran bold and clear through the Lords, the Commons, and the country; and it was quite impossible for Mr Balfour to maintain a middle position. He had to declare himself decisively and at once; the split was definite, and he must be definite also. For he and Lord Lansdowne had all too effectively inspired their party with confidence that, however bad things might seem on rehearsal, everything would be 'right on the night.' They had up to the last given the impression that the Government was bluffing, that the bluff would be called, and that it would be defeated. Thus the Unionist party was prepared for everything but surrender; up to almost the last moment the possibility of sheer disaster had never occurred to the rank-and-file, and now, when the blow descended, those who were not smitten with panic were consumed with fury. There was even wild talk of physical rebellion.

Mr Balfour, therefore, could not temporise. For the third time in his career he was overwhelmed by forces he had himself freed or generated, and this time they were too strong to be ultimately controlled. The dilemma was peculiarly agonising to a statesman constitutionally averse from extremes. For if it was a choice of evils, the choice was between really great evils. If Mr Balfour ranged himself with the 'Hedgers' the Bill would pass, and, passing by the votes of Unionist Peers, could not be disowned. If he led the 'Ditchers' (who included some of his oldest associates) the Bill would pass all the same, but with the additional disadvantage of the creation of a Liberal House of Lords. Consideration of this latter calamity was no doubt decisive. Mr Balfour declared for the 'Hedgers.' 'I agree,' he wrote on July 26, 'with the advice Lord Lansdowne has given to his friends: with Lord Lansdowne I stand; with Lord Lansdowne, I am ready, if need be, to fall.' With Mr Balfour went Lord Curzon, rather to the surprise of those who had watched his attitude since 1909. 'He is a fool,' Mr George Wyndham is said to have observed, 'for he might have been next Prime Minister.'[1] Mr Wyndham's story was that the rebellion against Mr Balfour was started by 'a letter, or the draft of a letter, he wrote agreeing to the creation of 160 Peers to pass the Parliament Bill. This Curzon, when he read it, dramatically tore up, exclaiming "That won't do"; and this makes the support he later gave Balfour all the more unaccountable.' It would seem that Mr Balfour was suspected (probably without the smallest ground) of having for some time been in secret understanding with the Prime Minister.

Round Lord Halsbury's standard gathered Mr

[1] 'My Diaries,' Wilfred Scawen Blunt.

Austen Chamberlain, Mr F. E. Smith, Sir Edward Carson, Lord Milner, Lord Selborne, the Dukes of Marlborough, Bedford, Westminster, and Somerset, and Lord Willoughby de Broke. The House of Cecil was divided once more; Mr Balfour, who had quarrelled with Lord Hugh Cecil over Tariff Reform, was again fated to be opposed to his cousin on this occasion. The two parties were at one in denouncing Mr Asquith, who, Mr Balfour declared, had 'arrogated to himself powers possessed by no Republican dictator,' and had, at the bidding of the Nationalists, 'trampled on the Constitution and dragged the Crown in the dust.' But such spirited talk did not conciliate the 'Ditchers,' whose noisy demonstration in the House of Commons, when the Prime Minister rose to disagree with the Lords' amendments, was aimed at least as much at their own nominal leader as at Mr Asquith. There was ingratitude in this attitude, for Mr Balfour had little personal part in bringing them into their troubles, and had fought with unmatched ability and energy to rescue them. But the ordinary man was unable to appreciate the cool and philosophical temper of the Unionist leader, who, when the event went against him, simply shrugged his shoulders and accepted the reverse with fortitude, like a barrister who has done his best for a client, but will not spoil his dinner by mourning over the hostile verdict. 'Arthur is not sufficiently interested in the issue' (concerning the Lords), said Mr Wyndham, while paying a tribute to his cleverness. 'He knows there was once an ice age, and that there will some day be an ice age again.'

At the 'Ditchers'' dinner to Lord Halsbury on the evening of the day on which Mr Balfour's decision was announced, the breach was emphasised. The very affection with which the name of Mr Balfour

was mentioned added stress to the decision with which his leadership was renounced. Mr Joseph Chamberlain telegraphed that he 'heartily supported' the object. Mr Austen Chamberlain was hailed as 'our future Prime Minister,' and confessed to 'a family failing: "What I have said I have said," and I can no other.' Mr Wyndham talked about the 'tragic touch' in it all, but spoke also with the stern virtue of a Brutus.

The Halsbury dinner put an end to the horrid uncertainty of the very large number of people who merely wanted to be on the winning side, or were anxious at least to escape proscription. It soon became apparent that though the 'Ditchers' included perhaps a majority of the conspicuous members of the party, they were numerically a minority. Lord Lansdowne manfully applied himself to the very unpleasant task of canvassing his fellow-Peers so as to secure the acceptance of the Bill, while Mr Balfour, affecting to minimise the Halsbury split, devoted himself to invective against the Government. Thus, moving a vote of censure on August 7, he discoursed angrily on the 'gross violation of constitutional liberty,' of which Mr Asquith had in his eyes been guilty. A 'great wrong' had been done to the King and his office. His Majesty had been placed in a 'cruel position.' The Government had 'corrupted the fountain of honour at its source.' Mr Asquith's action was not only 'mean and contemptible' but 'a crime'; a few weeks later Mr Balfour described it also as a 'felon blow.'

To this Mr Asquith replied fully, stating that the King, far from being hustled into a decision, had discussed the matter (before the second election of 1910) in all its bearings, and had come to the conclusion that he could only act on the Prime Minister's

advice for the creation of Peers if need be. Mr Asquith proceeded that he had striven to uphold the dignity of the Crown. 'But,' he added, 'I hold office also by the confidence of the people, and I should be guilty of treason to the people if in the supreme moment I had betrayed their trust.' The next day the House of Lords, giving what Lord Lansdowne described as 'perhaps its last decision as an independent assembly,' passed a vote of censure similiar to that which the Commons had rejected. The debate would not be worth noting but for the fact that some plain speaking on the part of Government Peers helped Lord Lansdowne in swelling the list of those Lords who were anxious, whatever happened, that there should be no 'adulteration of the Peerage.' Prominent among these, of course, were the recently ennobled, and especially those who were more than suspected of having received their titles in return for substantial consideration.

It was, however, still uncertain whether the Government would command a majority. Lord Lansdowne could only recommend abstention, and there were so few Liberal Peers that they might quite conceivably be swamped at the last moment by the followers of Lord Halsbury. In these circumstances certain Unionist Peers announced their intention of going into the Lobby with the Government. This 'treachery,' however, was so hotly resented that, for fear that the 'abstainers' would consider themselves absolved from their undertaking, the movement was abandoned. The Government at last decided to take the risk of rejection, and on August 9 the final debate began. The case for accepting the bitter cup was neatly put by Lord Newton, who described the 'Ditchers' as being like the Chinaman who kills himself on the doorstep

of one who has done him an injury. 'Ridicule will not kill the creation of peers,' he said, 'you will have the ridicule, and the Government the Peers.' The vote was taken on August 10, the anniversary of the final downfall of the French Monarchy. The Government was asked point-blank how many Peers it had authority to create. Lord Morley, his ascetic face taking on a deeper shade of gravity, read a statement he had prepared. Peers would be created to a number sufficient to 'guard against any possible combination of the different parties in opposition by which the Parliament Bill might be exposed a second time to defeat.'

This was decisive; from now onwards all but the irreconcilables counselled submission, and, though they scolded the Government, argued almost with passion against the 'degradation' of the patrician order. At last the solemn Earl of Selborne put, from the Die Hard or 'Ditcher' side, the question: 'Shall we perish in the dark, by our own hands, or in the light, killed by our enemies?' Then came the division; by 131 votes to 114 the House resolved not to insist on its amendments, in other words passed the Bill; the majority included thirty-seven 'Hedger' Peers, who were denounced as 'traitors', who had 'slain their brethren' But their action had saved their order and Lord Lansdowne's leadership, and had deferred for some little time the resignation of Mr Balfour, who was determined, had the Marquess resigned, to go with him.

The furious outcry that followed was not all on one side. If Mr Balfour and Lord Lansdowne were attacked with an acerbity seldom reached in this country, there were not wanting voices to accuse Mr Chamberlain of having 'split the party in 1903, committed it to a false step in 1909, and split it once

more in 1911.' There could be no doubt concerning the split, whatever its origin; and it roughly, though only roughly, corresponded with the division between ardent Chamberlainite and old-fashioned Conservative. The country itself had apparently done all its thinking in 1909, and was curiously apathetic, perhaps because there were other things to be thought about: a great railway strike, for example, and the Anglo-German crisis over Agadir—a matter on which Mr Balfour showed that the utmost heat of domestic controversy would not be allowed to weaken the Government in dealing with foreign complications.

Mr Balfour, it may be noted in parenthesis, did not stay to witness the last round in the fight of Lords and Commons. On the morning of August 10, while the issue was still uncertain as between the 'Hedgers' and 'Ditchers,' he left London for the cure at Bad Gastein. He had done all he could; he was tired out, as any man must be after exertions so prolonged and so concentrated; what was the use of sentimentalising over the result? So, no doubt, the matter would appear to a mind of Mr Balfour's texture: a mind, according to Mrs Asquith, 'metaphysical and religious,' with a 'vivid sense of the present life being of very little importance.' The same observer says that Mr Balfour once told her that in his view death, apart from the pain of it —'and I am a coward in regard to pain,' he said, 'being altogether without that kind of courage'— was an incident no more alarming than the passage from this room into that, the world to come being infinitely more important and amusing.[1] 'It is for that reason,' she adds, 'that he has no profound convictions about politics; they attract him only as a game which he thinks he plays well . . . but he

[1] 'My Diaries,' Wilfred Scawen Blunt.

does not really care for the things at stake, or believe that the happiness of mankind depends on events going this way or that.' However fanciful this picture, it has the kind of essential truth which lurks in the best examples of an exaggerated impressionism. Mr Balfour did think the passage of the Parliament Bill a matter of some, and even of very great, importance. He had fought it at every stage with immense ingenuity and pertinacity. But now the thing was done, and there was an end of it; the solid facts remained of the springs of Bad Gastein and their competence to do him a certain amount of good. But Mr Balfour, like so many clever men, made a mistake in not considering how the stupid man would interpret his philosophical acceptance of the accomplished fact. Forty-eight hours more in town would have satisfied every notion of decency. This departure for Gastein before the last scene savoured to the vulgar of cynicism.

CHAPTER XVII

On his return from the Continent Mr Balfour seems to have entertained some hopes of being able to mend the rents in the fabric of the Unionist party. At Haddington, early in October, he waved away, with that gay audacity which had so often served his turn, the whole episode of August. He actually spoke of the 'Hedger' and 'Ditcher' controversy as 'of no more importance than the authorship of the letters of Junius.' He had taken one view; 'able and loyal members of the party' had taken another; but that was now all 'ancient history.'

The reply of the malcontents was prompt and decisive. The Duke of Bedford accused Mr Balfour of 'blowing first hot, then cold, and then not at all,' of having for years 'damped down enthusiasm for Tariff Reform,' and of having filled workers in that cause with 'dismay and blank despair.' A Halsbury Club was formed, ostensibly for the purpose of 'restoring a free constitution to the United Kingdom,' really to perpetuate the revolt against the party leadership. The 'Die Hards' (as they were now generally called) were evidently determined that Mr Balfour must go; and he decided to go the moment it became clear that his tarrying must create a real split. Mr Balfour had never been attached to office for office's sake. His fortune was ample to secure him, without the addition of an official income, all that he valued in a material way. 'They tell me I am ruined,' he said once, in the worst days of agricultural depression, 'but if I am ruined I should not

have known it unless I had been told. I have everything in life I care for exactly as I had before.' Large means and small wants make for independence, and Mr Balfour's complete lack of vulgar ambition no doubt made the final decision easier. Long ago, in a letter to the Duke of Devonshire, he had expressed wonder at the 'curious fascination' place has for some men. At fifty-two, he said, he was not specially enamoured of the responsibilities of a Cabinet Minister; would he be eager for them at seventy or more?

Yet, despite this philosophical attitude, Mr Balfour can hardly have left without a pang the great position he had so long adorned. For there is no doubt that he loved the political game, if he did not love all the features of it; and he justly prided himself on his skill in playing it. So, though we have Mr Wyndham's authority for the statement that Mr Balfour had for some time been 'tired of politics,' it is pretty certain that he would not have resigned of his own motion. He was not, perhaps, actually dismissed; but he was placed in such a position that he could not conceal from himself that party unity, which he had always placed before any other domestic consideration, was endangered by his remaining.

So, in a dull room of the City of London Conservative Association, looking its dullest on a gloomy November afternoon, Mr Balfour laid down his stewardship. His speech was a model of valedictory dignity, equally without the cough of deprecation or the whimper of hurt self-love. He recalled a Parliamentary career of unequalled duration and distinction. Of his thirty-seven years as a member of the House of Commons, twenty had been spent in Unionist leadership, and he had led the House of Commons for ten years, 'a longer period of continuous leadership than that of any Minister since the

death of Pitt.' During the last quarter of a century he had been for seventeen years a member of the Cabinet. If there was just pride in this review of the past there was a suspicion of irony in Mr Balfour's references to the present. He had been told that there was a danger, with advancing age, of 'petrefaction' of the faculties. He himself had been conscious of nothing of the kind, but it might seize him before he was aware, and he had made up his mind not to control another Ministry. The question was not whether to go, but when to go, and this seemed to be the time. The rest of the session would be relatively uncontroversial; the next would be replete with revolutionary proposals. It was said that there was 'unrest' in the party, but, added Mr Balfour (with a humorously acid memory of eight or nine years of perpetual trouble), he did not think that 'anything exceptional' existed.

'Remember,' he went on, in a long-remembered passage of delicious satire aimed at the Halsbury Club, 'that parties are made up of human beings . . . and there will always be people, when things are not going right, who grumble and criticise. . . . Such critics are like the microbes which (as doctors tell us) always dwell within our organism. If we sit in a draught or lower our vitality by fatigue, we get a violent cold or slight fever, but when our strength is recovered the microbe resumes its proper place.' Mr Balfour evidently had as little respect for his critics as the Archbishop had for Gil Blas when he wished him all success and a little more taste.

Thus died politically Arthur James Balfour, 'the greatest Parliamentary figure of the time,' and Mr Andrew Bonar Law (who had spoken of him thus only a few days before) reigned in his stead, not indeed as leader of the party as a whole, but of the

Unionists of the House of Commons. Mr Law, chosen because the selection of Mr Walter Long or Mr Austen Chamberlain would probably have enlarged and confirmed schism instead of ending it, occupied the rather unhappy position of the citizen king who succeeds a legitimate monarch; he was largely dependent on those who placed him there, and had, moreover, the discomfort of knowing that in this case the dethroned was no puppet, but a man of quite extraordinary ability and of exquisite taste. The frantic cheers which greeted Mr Balfour on his first appearance in the House of Commons after his resignation were, in essence, a vote of censure, from all but a fraction of the assembly, on the intrigues which displaced him.

Mr Balfour himself, whatever may have been his private reflections, most scrupulously played the game. He could not have been human had he refrained from an inward chuckle when Mr Law, once the Bois-Guilbert of the Confederates, began to experience precisely the same difficulties against which Mr Balfour had contended so long, and, lacking the latter's skill in mystification, was forced into an almost ridiculous position. For, after the Conservative and Liberal Unionist parties had been 'fused,' after Mr Balfour's referendum pledge had been solemnly repudiated, and after Mr Austen Chamberlain had declared how a Tariff Reform Government, free from restrictions of any kind, would act on assuming office, the Free Trade element in the party suddenly discovered its full strength. Or, rather, the constituencies began to speak. It so happened that while almost all the ardent Tariff Reformers held extremely safe seats, a full hundred Unionist members, otherwise inclined to be lukewarm, were far less favourably situated. These men

felt that the removal of all obstacles to the immediate adoption of Mr Chamberlain's fiscal policy must have a most unfavourable effect on chances already none too good of coming back to the House of Commons at the next election. 'Depend upon it, when a man is to be hanged in a fortnight,' said Dr Johnson, 'it concentrates his mind wonderfully.' The prospect of electoral disaster roused these Laodiceans, largely belonging to Lancashire, to a great effort, and the result was that Mr Law, who was pledged to every letter of the Birmingham Bible, was obliged to return to that very policy of procrastination—the policy of 'two elections'—for which Mr Balfour had been so roundly condemned. The retired statesman could hardly have expected so prompt a justification of his view, expressed consistently in action if only intermittently in words, that Tariff Reform was a 'great change' which must be 'fully discussed' before any attempt was made to impose it.

Mr Balfour naturally refrained from intervention in the curious series of transactions which led to the virtual abandonment, just at the moment when its acceptance seemed assured, of the full fiscal policy. But he supported the new leader with point, vigour, and even passion in all that related to the Irish controversy, though, with his usual adroitness, he just missed giving that unqualified support to the Ulster case of 'fighting and being right' which Mr Law's zeal or inexperience freely yielded. In moving the rejection of the Home Rule Bill in January, 1913, he accused the Government of duping everybody—the Irish by a promise of nationality, the British by promises of peace from the Irish question; the people of the South had been told that they had a right to govern themselves according to their own ideas; the people of the North were told that they would be

happier if they were governed according to the ideas of others. Five months later he warned the Government of an approaching collision, recalling that between the *Victoria* and the *Camperdown*. Ulster was determined to maintain what she considered to be her inalienable rights; let members search their consciences as to whether, for the sake of this Bill, they could approve the shooting of Ulstermen. Thus, from time to time, did Mr Balfour go to the extreme of energetic criticism concerning the one domestic subject on which he seems to have felt strongly; but the line was never quite passed which separated him from the followers of Sir Edward Carson, and he could not be said to have added his name to what Mr Asquith termed the countersignature by the Unionist leaders of the 'whole grammar of anarchy.' Despite, and perhaps because of this fact, his attacks on the Government in relation to Ulster were the most damaging it had to meet; Mr Balfour has always been unequalled in the construction of Irish dilemmas.

On another subject, that of the Marconi charges, his attitude was characteristic. He repudiated the charges of corruption, but held that the Attorney-General had acted without making proper inquiries, and ridiculed the description of Mr Lloyd George's purchase as an investment; were not five-sixths of the shares sold at a profit within two days? And what would Mr Gladstone have said of a Chancellor of the Exchequer who speculated? Mr Balfour, indeed, rather resembled the Japanese mother who burns her children with the moxa, primarily for the good of their health, but also to remind them not to be naughty again.

Regarding purely English affairs, Mr Balfour only shared in debates in which he took special interest.

Once, in a discussion on education, he delivered himself of the dictum that competitive examinations are 'soul-killing'; and in his criticism of the Plural Voting Bill of 1914 he was in his element in defending the 'happy anomaly' of the University vote. His last notable speech before the war had for its subject the death of Mr Joseph Chamberlain: 'a great idealist, a great friend, a great orator, and a great man.' It was a subject which might well have inspired his highest powers; yet the tribute seemed strangely formal for one who had worked so long and intimately with Mr Chamberlain, and suggested that, well as they got on together on the whole, Mr Balfour, as has already been suggested, was less the lover than the one who allows himself to be loved. For Mr Chamberlain's powers as orator and debater so excellent a judge could not fail of sincere admiration; the 'vehement confidence' remarked by Lord Morley as Mr Chamberlain's great characteristic must sometimes have filled him with wondering envy. But Mr Balfour, fastidious and finished, was never wholly uncritical even on this side. 'A little, perhaps, in the style of the Colonial Secretary, don't you think?' he is said to have remarked to his sister when she told him how she had retorted crushingly but somewhat obviously on a rude fellow-traveller in a third-class carriage. Whether well founded or merely well found, the story is not without point; it was never possible to watch Mr Balfour, while his great colleague was speaking, without feeling that a certain temperamental revolt mingled with his intellectual appreciation. Both the strong and the weaker side of Mr Chamberlain were, indeed, equally calculated to jar on the sensitive taste and ironical mind of his leader. In the inoffensive sense of the word, Mr Chamberlain was a great demagogue;

from first to last the power of popular appeal was his strength; it was to the people he addressed himself, whether to promote his own case or to damage that of his opponents. Mr Balfour, on the other hand, was never less happy than in condescending, as he occasionally did, to the prejudices of the vulgar, and was always better suited to small companies than large. His best speaking was in the nature of conversation, and conversation on a low emotional level. 'For him,' it has been well observed, 'the passions are too common and the emotions too intimate for public use.' He occasionally used invective, but never quite convincingly; he had always the air on such occasions of deliberately working himself up into a false passion. His true weapon, in which he had no rival, was satirical analysis, and that has small effect on popular audiences. Thus, while Mr Balfour's Irish speeches in the House of Commons showed him, at this period, at his best, he was almost at his worst in making his maiden appearance (in April, 1914) as a Hyde Park orator on the occasion of the 'demonstration' against the Coercion of Ulster. But if Mr Balfour had his limitations, so had Mr Chamberlain; and to those who listened to Mr Balfour's panegyric on that great man a sense of the tragedy of their long association could not have been absent. This nobly gifted pair, the qualities of the one supplementing those of the other, seemed destined at one time to hand down to posterity an example of fruitful co-operation between unlikes. But a malign fate decreed that they should wear out themselves (and incidentally much else) in a contest which can hardly be said to have involved any substantial difference of principle. 'What a cursed business is politics!' Lord Salisbury is said to have remarked when the unhappy Earl of Iddesleigh

died at the Foreign Office, his last moments embittered, if his death was not actually hastened, by the humiliations he had undergone. Lord Salisbury's nephew, speaking by the open grave of Joseph Chamberlain, might be conscious of no spasm of self-reproach; he had acted in good feeling and in good faith. But he could hardly avoid experiencing the 'dint of pity' and exclaiming internally against the unreason of things political.

CHAPTER XVIII

Barren to the verge of futility from the point of view of domestic politics, the forty months of Mr Balfour's Premiership were of high moment to the British Empire, to the Continent of Europe, and to the world at large. During this short space of time a fundamental and (as it proved) an irrevocable change took place in British foreign policy, and for that change Mr Balfour, more than any other statesman, was responsible.

Up to 1902 he had acquiesced in the policy of Lord Salisbury, which was, broadly speaking, to prolong that sleeping partnership with Prussia which had endured during all the important years of Queen Victoria's reign. Bismarck had declared that there could be no quarrel between the whale and the elephant, but it was obvious that each could be useful to the other. It was, in truth, a considerable advantage to Great Britain to have Prussia acting as a policeman on the Continent, so long as the constable remained content with his wages and such little luxuries as might be spared from our abounding kitchen. British Radicalism as well as British Imperialism, the Quakerish ideals of John Bright no less than the brilliant opium-dreams of Benjamin Disraeli, reposed on the same solid fact: the power of Prussian militarism. The very liberalism of our speculative thought was ultimately due to our virtual alliance with the least liberal of European Powers. Stuart Mill's individualism and Herbert Spencer's anarchism would have failed to secure the assent of any considerable part of the nation had it not grown to believe,

first in the invincibility, and secondly in the goodwill, of Prussia. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the whole character of British life for nearly forty years was determined by faith in the Prussian military tradition and confidence that there could be no antagonism between Prussian ambitions and our own. From Cecil Rhodes to the Nonconformist pastor whose 'unctuous rectitude' he derided, almost every British person took it for granted that there were only two considerable dangers to be feared, the greed of Russia and the restlessness of France, and that in respect of both the sharpness of the Prussian sword was our best safeguard.

It is not strange that politicians were to a special degree under the domination of this notion, still less strange that the most sturdily patriotic politicians should be most sturdily pro-German. For the patriot almost always tends to be behind the times; he is too much occupied with old enemies to notice new ones. Our patriots under Mary helped Spain against France, merely because they were a century behind the times. Our patriots under Cromwell hammered rejoicingly at a sinking Spain, under the influence of ideas which were antiquated not long after the defeat of the Armada. Our patriots under Pitt helped Frederick the Great because they could not forget that Louis XIV. had once been the enemy. In the same way British patriots during the greater part of the nineteenth century were acutely conscious of every word and deed of French and Russian statesmen, but watched with indifference or approval the consolidation of the great Germanic power.

On the Prussian side there was also a considerable motive for the maintenance of this singular partnership. Prussia had come late into the field of world-politics, and if she were to secure her share of world

trade and dominion it must be, for the present at all events, through the greatest of colonising and naval Powers. Whether from indifference or policy, Bismarck exacted only a small part of the price which was to be ultimately demanded. But with the accession of William II. a more extortionate spirit became manifest at the German Foreign Office, and one of the main tasks of Lord Salisbury as Foreign Minister was to meet the ever-growing desire of the German Empire for its 'place in the sun.' It was natural that Mr Balfour should acquiesce in his uncle's policy of making things as easy as possible for Germany. He had a deep respect for Lord Salisbury's sagacity; he had himself grown up in the Victorian tradition; he might well think that the world was wide enough for the Colonial ambitions of both Powers, and that the German Empire would be a better neighbour and a less dangerous rival if it possessed valuable hostages overseas. In any case, we have, in Prince Lichnowsky's disclosures, a hint as to the extent to which Lord Salisbury and Mr Balfour were prepared to go, about the time of the Diamond Jubilee, to purchase the extension of the conditions which alone made 'magnificent isolation' possible. Emperor William had given a broad hint, in his telegram to President Kruger after the Jameson Raid, that Prussian friendship, and even Prussian tolerance, must be paid for. Two years later, in 1898, according to Prince Lichnowsky, a secret treaty was signed by Mr Balfour and Count Hatzfeldt, the German ambassador at the Court of St James's, which divided the Portuguese colonies in Africa into economico-political spheres of interest between Germany and Great Britain. The extension and full implementation of this singular compact was a constant aim of German diplomacy for many years; and it is tempting to

speculate what might have been the result of these efforts had the relations between the two Courts and the two Foreign Offices remained during the early years of the twentieth century what they had been during the nineteenth.

The accession of King Edward, however, brought into play a wholly new set of influences. In 1910, Mr Balfour, speaking on the resolutions of condolence on the King's death, 'referred to those who supposed that in foreign affairs the King took upon himself duties which were commonly left to the Monarch's servants, and suggested that when the secrets of diplomacy were revealed it would be found that he took a part not known, but half-suspected, in the transactions of his reign. That was to belittle the King. They ought not to think of him as a dexterous diplomatist. It was because he was able, naturally and simply, through the incalculable gift of personality, to embody in the eyes of all men the friendly policy of this country that he was able to do a work in bringing the nations together, which it had fallen to the lot of few men, whether Kings or subjects, to accomplish.' This carefully worded tribute does not, it will be observed, exclude the view so generally held—and not least firmly by German statesmen—that the King's liking for France and his lack of liking for the German Emperor had much to do with the abrupt modification of British policy which followed his accession. As early as 1875 Gambetta had based hopes of an Anglo-French understanding on the character of the Prince of Wales, who, in his belief, had 'the makings of a notable statesman'; and it would be blindness to facts to accept the view that the King's happy talent for saying and doing the right thing merely served the convenience of Ministerial policy. The truth is probably that King

Edward, while keeping well within the limits that hedge a constitutional king, did not conceal his own views. Under no form of monarchy can the expressed convictions of the Monarch be negligible; and it would be quite in the order of things that Lord Salisbury, soaked with the Victorian tradition, too old and too tired to change the whole current of his thoughts, should give place to a more supple and receptive intelligence.

It is certain that Mr Balfour, whether he conceived or merely adopted the idea of the Entente Cordiale, carried it into execution with great energy and ability. Lord Lansdowne at the Foreign Office was merely the agent; the directing mind in the negotiations of 1903 and 1904 was that of the Prime Minister. An atmosphere of amity, miraculously in contrast with the fierce bickering of two or three years before, rendered possible the speedy settlement of questions not few or unimportant, respecting Egypt, Newfoundland, West Africa, Madagascar, the New Hebrides, and Siam; and on April 8, 1904, the publication of the Anglo-French agreement affirmed a solidarity which stood the strain of vehement German objections to the special position of France towards Morocco, no less than the passing danger of British embroilment with France's ally, Russia, over the unfortunate affair of the North Sea fishing fleet—the latter an incident treated by Mr Balfour with a mingled firmness and tact which extorted the admiration of his bitterest domestic critics. During the visit of the French Fleet in August, 1905, Mr Balfour, speaking to the officers who were the guests of the Houses of Parliament in Westminster Hall, emphasised the 'pacific and entirely non-aggressive' nature of the understanding. Nevertheless, it was generally believed that during the Moroccan crisis

which led to the retirement of M. Delcassé, one of the chief architects of the Entente on the French side, Great Britain had given France to understand that she would not stand idly by if the Republic were the victim of unprovoked attack. A hint of this may be discerned in Mr Balfour's speech at the Lord Mayor's banquet on November 9, 1905. He was certainly not dealing in mere platitude when he said:—

'I think, for my part, that in future we shall not see wars, unless, indeed, we can conceive that either a nation or a ruler should arise who felt that they cannot carry on their schemes of national aggrandisement except by trampling upon the rights of their neighbours. I see no prospect of any such calamity in Europe.'

'There has been no Prime Minister,' Lord Lansdowne had said a few days before, 'who has given a closer and more unremitting attention to foreign affairs than Mr Balfour.' In truth he had, amid all the distractions of the fiscal controversy, laid so firmly the foundations of the new policy that he could at last without qualm contemplate his own supersession. Had his Government been displaced in 1903, when Mr Chamberlain had in mind an immediate appeal to the country, the whole history of the twentieth century might well have been different. At the end of 1905 the Entente Cordiale was so far accepted as the basis of our foreign relationships that Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, as Liberal Prime Minister, found it possible, 'without departure from Liberal tradition,' to promise 'substantial continuity.' The subsequent work of Sir Edward Grey was, indeed, chiefly the execution of plans he

found at the Foreign Office. In opposition Mr Balfour afforded valuable support to a Government generally more harassed in foreign matters by its own nominal followers than by its nominal antagonists. Thus Mr Balfour upheld Sir Edward Grey in his much criticised agreement with Russia, steadily gave him succour in each recurring Anglo-German crisis, from Algeciras to Bosnia, and from Bosnia to Agadir, and made it clear to the future enemy, on every appropriate occasion, that those who calculated on domestic dissensions misunderstood the temper of the British people and underrated the patriotism of the Opposition. Even in the heat of the Parliament Bill fight of 1911, he could declare (on the subject of Germany's provocative despatch of the *Panther* to Agadir) that no party difference must interfere with national solidarity when British interests were at stake—though he could not help adding that adherence to this salutary rule had never been made so difficult.

The mixture of flexibility and tenacity in Mr Balfour's character was undoubtedly a considerable asset to the country in the very peculiar circumstances of his Premiership. A less adroit man must have been wrecked in the confusion wrought by Mr Chamberlain's fiscal adventure. A less quietly obstinate man must have given up in despair and disgust the task of carrying on and fighting for time. Mr Balfour, having decided what to do and how to do it, went his way with perfect stoicism, regardless of private friendships, of the taunts of the Opposition, of the mutiny of his own followers, of the affrighted expostulations of party agents, of the jeers of the mob, of the destruction of what hopes he may have entertained of his own career as a domestic statesman. It is only when we consider him, it may be as a fiscal

pococurante, but also as a man of European mind mainly intent on the enormous European problem shaping itself at the beginning of the century, that we can appreciate the quality, not far short of heroism, which dignified the dexterous sophister of *Economic Notes* and the ' half sheet of note-paper.'

CHAPTER XIX

The opening of the Great War found Mr Balfour confirmed in his new status as an Elder Statesman. He held a position somewhat resembling that of Mr Gladstone in the middle and late seventies; without responsibilities he nevertheless exercised more influence of a certain kind than any member of his party. Indeed, in some respects his authority in the country was greater than in his official days; for it was felt that, always free from the temptations which assail the ignoble sort among politicians, he was now less subject to those more subtle but not less imperious influences which deflect the judgment and blunt the conscience of the most upright party leader.

Thus it was a considerable support that he was able to give, on the fateful 3rd of August, 1914, to that section of Mr Asquith's Cabinet which, convinced of its duty, had still to encounter much opposition both within and without Downing Street. Mr Balfour intervened rather late in the discussion on Sir Edward Grey's statement, and when he did so it was to declare that 'the dregs and lees of debate' had been reached. With his usual perception, he had realised the essential unimportance of the Pacifist voices; with his usual decision (when he cared to be decisive) he declined to pay the opposition the compliment of even recognising it as rational. It was more necessary to create abroad an impression of firmness and unity than to conciliate a small minority at home, and in the circumstances an almost casual expression of contempt was more powerful than argument.

A month later Mr Balfour, speaking at the Guildhall with the Prime Minister and Mr Bonar Law, took 'unbroken unity' for his text. Yet in the interval the negative in him had asserted itself. On the last day of August, it had been deemed necessary for Parliament to return to the Home Rule Bill, the Buckingham Palace conference as to which had broken down just before the war. Ireland was then a 'bright spot,' the only bright spot in an overcast sky. The Government believed that, by placing the Home Rule Bill on the Statute Book (and by no other means) the spot could be kept bright. Mr Balfour dissented with some vigour. The question, he said, could not be touched without rousing 'great bitterness of feeling between parties'; he did not proceed to point out how bitterness of feeling could be avoided by simply leaving the matter alone. But if on Ireland Mr Balfour remained the 'Everlasting Nay' incarnate, subsequent speeches showed that, to a far greater degree than some of his associates, he had grasped the moral significance of the Great War. For those who represented it as essentially the fight of two great Empires for the hegemony of the world, there was implied reproof in Mr Balfour's declaration at the Lord Mayor's banquet in November that we were fighting 'not for ourselves alone, but for civilisation.' His condemnation of German cynicism was equally a rebuke to the native article. Cynicism in diplomacy was familiar enough to him, and perhaps not wholly foreign to his nature; yet his attitude is quite understandable. A difference in degree often amounts to a difference in kind, and what might be comparatively venial in skilled and polished hands was wholly unsightly when illustrated by Prussian Junkerdom. At Bristol, a month later, Mr Balfour talked of the superman as a 'monster

of aggressive egotism,' who, if he were materialised, would have to be dealt with by the police, and the 'super-state' he described as wholly inconsistent with the true notion of a great community of civilised and mutually dependent nations.

Indeed, Mr Balfour, though at one time by no means free from the tendency of Victorian Englishmen of culture to exalt Prussia as the one progressive element of Continental Europe, had stopped short well this side of idolatry. To some degree attracted by the dialectical brilliance of Nietzsche, his mind had recoiled from the ultimate absurdities of the Nietzschean creed. In one of his Gifford lectures at Glasgow, a few months before the war, he had trenchantly criticised Nietzschism, maintaining that altruism and all the higher values of the ethical scale must be judged apart from their effect in helping or hindering a merely internecine struggle for existence. This view was never absent from his mind during the war; from first to last he laid due stress on the imponderables.

Mr Balfour, as a member of the Committee of Imperial Defence which he had so largely helped to fashion, was from the first in close touch with Ministers, and was as busy as most members of the Cabinet. It was in this capacity that he issued a defence of the blockade of Germany as a measure in retaliation for the 'sink at sight' policy of the enemy. While perfectly firm in tone, it hinted apology to the neutral world alike for the practical inconvenience caused and for technical infringements of the conventions of war; Mr Balfour has never believed in that kind of strength which consists in creating unnecessary difficulties by an economy in the cheap article of international courtesy.

In the spring of 1915 Mr Balfour refused to join

in the fashionable chorus of pessimism; he declared that in April Germany was morally and materially weaker than in the preceding autumn; he paid a glowing tribute to the Headquarters Staff in London, and spoke cheerfully of the future. In the famous 'shells' controversy he vigorously supported Lord Kitchener, and when he took Mr Churchill's place at the Admiralty, on the construction of the First Coalition, he was in the position of one presenting an invitation card rather than (as in certain other cases) a crowbar. The appointment was in some ways appropriate. Mr Balfour had always belonged to the 'Blue water School.' In his opinion the world would have been intolerable had supremacy on sea and land been vested in one power. His faith and pride in the Navy separated him from those who thus early cried out on the inadequacy of the British effort. Thus at the London Opera House in the summer of 1915, he reminded his audience that if Britain had not joined her friends, a German fleet would have ridden triumphant over the North Sea, the Adriatic, and the Mediterranean, and 'all the anticipations of Germany in Germany's most sanguine mood would have been accomplished and more than accomplished.' Rather scornfully he spoke of those who showed patriotic fervour by belittling our contribution to the allied cause. Also, he dwelt on the enemy's mistakes. The Germans had been right about big guns and munitions, but had they been right in their diplomatic or in any of their other calculations? He seemed to realise what was hidden from many, that our mistakes could be remedied, but that those of Germany could not. This speech, delivered on the first anniversary of the declaration of war, was a typical Balfour speech of the period. It did not put the material issue in the foreground;

it showed an appreciation of factors invisible to those who regarded episodes rather than tendencies. In the same spirit Mr Balfour could speak of the Zeppelin as 'brutal but not effective.' Writing of the German submarine policy a little later, he could note the difference between Germany's triumph over the sinking of the *Lusitania* and her melancholy silence over the sinking of the *Arabia*. 'Deeds,' he said, 'which were merely crimes in May are seen to be blunders in September.'

As First Lord, Mr Balfour lived somewhat in mystery. The public heard most of him on such matters as the defence of London—matters which probably absorbed more of the attention of the man in the street than of the Cabinet. When a 'gingerous' Liberal member wanted to know whether our anti-aircraft guns were of the right kind, powerful enough, manned by the right crews, in charge of the right men, and in every way as satisfactory as those of Paris, Mr Balfour showed no inclination to accept the proffered portion of humble pie. Guns, he remarked, could not be obtained by merely saying we were ready to pay for them, nor until we knew the kind of gun wanted. There were things foreseen and things unforeseen; also there were things unforeseeable. When another member, this time Conservative, pressed for information as to where lay the responsibility for sending up naval and military planes, Mr Balfour gave the succinct answer that 'the military were responsible for sending up military planes, and the Navy were responsible for sending up naval planes.' Equally thirsty for knowledge, an Irish member questioned the First Lord as to what new steps were being taken to protect the population of the great city of which, during the session, he was himself an inhabitant. The official

reply was that the matter was 'a subject for anxious study.'

Domestic criticism, indeed, had little effect on Mr Balfour. 'We British,' he said in reference to attacks on the Government in the press, 'have always taken a gloomy joy in self-depreciation.' Leading articles, in which we were daily styling ourselves miserable sinners, were however translated and circulated abroad, and he asked those prophets who were 'not very sanguine of success' to have a care. The entry of Bulgaria into the war gave point to his warning. Mr Balfour had realised that shrieks of 'Wake up, England' might not only rouse a somnolent John Bull, but would possibly be interpreted in Europe as evidence of panic and weakness. For the rest, he had a fastidious dislike of sensationalism, even as an emergency measure. However, in those days of public excitement, Mr Balfour could not retire to an ivory tower, or even to a golf pavilion. Thus when it was adjudged necessary to advertise the British Navy, he responded willingly, if with a private shrug of deprecation. At the Empire Music-hall—'a rather unaccustomed theatre of operations'—the First Lord introduced to the London public a cinematograph show illustrating the work of the Fleet.

Mr Balfour took little public part in the controversy over conscription. He regarded the matter as one of simple expediency, and was, with Mr Asquith and the majority of the Liberals, content to wait until Lord Kitchener declared that voluntary enlistment would no longer suffice for the needs of the armies. On the other side the most notable politicians were Mr Lloyd George and Lord Curzon. The influence of Mr Balfour behind the scenes was mainly exerted to prevent, or at least postpone, the split which

afterwards took place. When the first Military Service Act became a necessity, Mr Balfour defended it on grounds of pure expediency, but also declared that until quite recently he had not favoured compulsion. From this standpoint he could deal equally with the specific opposition of Sir John Simon, and with the vague alarm of many worthy people who might have been frightened by the enthusiasm of the conscriptionists for conscription's sake into believing that the alleged national necessities were being made a pretext for the introduction of a principle repellent to perhaps a majority of the inhabitants of the British Islands. The whole matter, said Mr Balfour, was a question of ways and means, and the operation of the measure would be only temporary. All this could not be described as a clarion call to the youth of Great Britain. But there could be little doubt of the tactical superiority at the moment of arguments based purely on national emergency over arguments based on the general virtues of conscription.

Early in 1916 there was a scare about the German naval guns which, it was said, could and would outrange our own. The return of the *Möwe* from a raiding expedition caused excitement. Our East Coast was said to be ineffectually defended. Members of Parliament were talking again about air raids. Mr Balfour had to absorb himself in the work of his department, and may not have been sorry for this excuse for holding aloof from the controversy about extending conscription from the single to the married. His old skill in dialectics was shown in his defence of the Admiralty. He admitted that German superiority in material was undoubted. Those who had made the war had naturally prepared for it. 'Possibly,' he added, after a moment's pause, 'we might have foreseen,' and the apparent sign of

contrition was greeted by a burst of cheers. As they subsided Mr Balfour completed his sentence: 'had we been endowed with that wisdom after the event with which all honourable gentlemen have been in such large measure blessed by Providence.' But this raillery only spurred the sterner critics to renewed activity, and, on a certain day in March, 1916, the regular forces operating against the First Lord were joined by Colonel Winston Churchill, who, doubtful whether he could save England from the chancellery of the Duchy of Lancaster, had decided on a short spell of active service. Fresh from the trenches, Colonel Churchill declared his displeasure at the conduct of the existing Board of Admiralty, which, he claimed, contrasted unfavourably with that of his day. It happened that the same day, in Whitehall, a score of sandwich-men were exhibiting an appeal for the return of Lord Fisher, this somewhat mysterious demonstration claiming to represent the views of 25,000,000 readers of the public press. Within the House, Lord Fisher himself sat above the clock and listened to the eulogy of his former civilian chief. After five months he had refused to work longer with Mr Churchill; now he heard Colonel Churchill suggesting that he (Lord Fisher) ought to be summoned from retirement to work with Mr Balfour. Lord Fisher's smile suggested that the irony of the situation was not lost on him.

On this occasion Mr Balfour brought really heavy guns to play on the critics of his administration. He dealt first with the accusation that there had been a sudden stoppage of shipbuilding. There was, he said, no truth in the suggestion, and he did not know who it was who 'disseminated such fictions, who fed, watered, cultivated and spread them.'

'We have,' he added, 'pursued to the utmost of our ability the broad, general lines marked out for us by the distinguished board which went before us.' If in any way he and his associates had been cramped, it was by lack of labour. It was useless for the Churchill-Fisher Board to arrogate to itself a monopoly of 'bustle, hurry, and push.' Some of the monitors created a while ago in six months had been so hastily designed, so ill-contrived for their purpose, that they were still being remodelled. Mr Churchill, on leaving a civil for a military career, had complained that Lord Fisher had given him neither clear guidance before the event, nor firm support after it; yet here was Colonel Churchill insisting that Lord Fisher ought to return to take the place now held by Sir Henry Jackson. Mr Balfour clearly deprecated the charge that was to be thrust upon him. The only complaint, it seemed to him, that could be advanced against Sir Henry was that he was not a newspaper favourite. Moreover, why should it be imagined that Lord Fisher could work more easily with one First Lord than with another? 'Is it my merits?' Mr Balfour demanded, and the smile on the face of the Admiral of the Fleet grew wider. Finally, Colonel Churchill's criticisms had been inaccurate, and, if they had been accurate, they would have been detrimental to the national safety. If, on the outbreak of war, somebody had said that the Fleet had not a single naval base on the East Coast that could be called safe from submarine attack, and that the trade routes were imperfectly policed by fast cruisers, the statement would have been perfectly true and entirely unpatriotic. The 'deliberate desire to suggest doubts, fears and alarms to the public was against the public interest.'

The House of Commons regarded this vigorous riposte as a decided Parliamentary victory for Mr Balfour. But the larger public has a way of disregarding such triumphs, and, under the influence of constant press attacks, it was beginning to form the opinion that the Balfour-Jackson régîme, if safe, was not brilliant. A fillip was given to this sentiment by the Jutland Battle, in regard to which Mr Balfour (as might have been expected) proved himself a poor publicity agent. The first news was of our losses, and all the leading articles were based on them; the better news arrived in time for insertion, but not for comment. Hence the universal editorial mind was irritated, and remained irritated. Mr Balfour, not for the first time in his career, suffered from his real or assumed indifference to 'public opinion.' From this time it became the fashion in some quarters to make Mr Balfour the butt of solemn denunciation and lively satire. He was severely cross-examined as to his air policy; and his reply to the 'Air Committee' of both houses, containing among other things statistics as to the number of oxen necessary to provide gold-beaters' skin for a single Zeppelin, was condemned as highly unsatisfactory. From the particular, the attack enlarged to the general. It was suggested either that Sir Henry Jackson should have a more energetic civilian chief than Mr Balfour, or that Mr Balfour should have a more 'active' body of naval advisers than that of which Sir Henry Jackson was the head. German raiders had again slipped into the Channel, the German submarines were meeting with alarming success, and want of energy in shipbuilding was alleged. All through the autumn the agitation for a change at the Admiralty proceeded, and at the end of November Sir John (now Viscount) Jellicoe was

taken from the command of the Grand Fleet to be First Sea Lord.

The change, though it preceded, was only incidental to a larger revolution. For some time the groups which had always existed in the Government had hardened into parties and into factions. Mr Balfour, tending to side with the Prime Minister, naturally shared in the campaign of disparagement of which Mr Asquith was the main object; to discredit the old Conservative leader was a move in discrediting the old Liberal leader. In the manœuvres which thrust Mr Asquith from power Mr Balfour had neither part nor lot; and he seems to have been taken over by the new Government almost as a piece of the official furniture. Mr Asquith regarded him, not unnaturally, as an essential in the composition of the inner circle of the Cabinet. Mr Lloyd George, however, ignored all considerations of his Parliamentary prestige, his statesmanlike experience, and his acute intellect. Mr Balfour was appointed to fill the vacancy caused by Viscount Grey's retirement from the Foreign Office, but, for the first time in our political history, the Foreign Secretary was ranked as a mere departmental chief. Sir Edward Carson, who had succeeded Mr Balfour at the Admiralty, also displaced him in the supreme council of the nation. Mr Balfour had been loyal to Mr Asquith while he remained; Mr Asquith gone, there was no reason why he should not serve under Mr Lloyd George. But history will probably pay a warm tribute to the patriotism which rose superior to all personal considerations when, with his great powers and his unequalled prestige, Mr Balfour agreed to consider himself the subordinate of every member of that constitutional curiosity, the 'War Cabinet.'[1]

[1]Mr Balfour, however, frequently attended meetings of the War Cabinet.

CHAPTER XX

It may be esteemed a fortunate circumstance that Mr Balfour permitted no self-love to stand between him and his duty in the last days of 1916. The times demanded precisely the qualities which he, almost alone among the disposable statesman, possessed. Our Allies wanted most tactful handling; our relations with neutral States were delicate in the extreme. America's attitude, above all, called for equal vigilance and dexterity.

The American people were beginning to recognise that they must play a decisive part in the war. But on which side? The tendency in this country to regard a great foreign Power, with a most strongly developed national *ego*, as in some mysterious way bound to see every world problem through British eyes, had obscured the plain fact that American opinion was, on the whole, far from friendly to Great Britain. The humanitarian and sentimental side of the American character was, indeed, early outraged by the acts of German militarism, and early impressed by the unequal struggle gallantly maintained by France. But it did less than justice to the British case and the British effort, and not only sentimental but practical considerations operated to create an atmosphere of suspicion and almost of hostility. The War of Independence, the War of 1812, and the voyage of the *Alabama*, forgotten on our side of the Atlantic, were vividly remembered on the other; and but for the singular stupidity of the heads of the German State, in almost making a point of sinking American ships, it might well have been that the

ghost of George III would have prevailed over the living iron-and-blood of William of Hohenzollern. Apart from his submarines, the German belligerent interfered little with the United States; our interference was necessarily constant and world-wide. Moreover, United States citizens were not a little irritated by British clamours that they really must come into the war, and British jeers because they had not come into it. They might regret President Wilson's 'too proud to fight' solecism. But, fully conscious of their own freedom from the smallest taint of cowardice, they could hardly be human without resenting the ridicule which greeted that lapse.

Towards the end of 1916 President Wilson deemed it proper to put forward proposals for peace on the basis of a League of Nations, and it was one of Mr Balfour's first duties to return a reasoned reply to the invitation. The task was accomplished with admirable tact and firmness. Defining our 'war aims' Mr Balfour declared for the restoration to France of her lost provinces, for the expulsion of the Turk from Europe, and for 'some form of international sanction' to support treaties and give pause to disturbers of the peace. He insisted on the indispensability of carrying on the war until the aggressive policy of the Central Powers had been discredited even among their own peoples, but in no way shut the door on a 'clean peace,' and made it clear that our aims were not 'imperialistic.' A comparison of this frank and specific declaration with the rather clumsy evasions of Berlin had unquestionably much to do with determining the attitude of the American nation when, a few weeks later, the revival of unrestricted submarine warfare (announced in a speech of unrivalled cynicism by the

German Chancellor), induced President Wilson to break off diplomatic relations.

Active support of the Allied cause was, however, for some time problematical. In April, 1917, Mr Balfour, announced to take the chair at the Pilgrims' Dinner in London, was absent from his place, and some were ready to see in his absence a slight to our new associates. He was in fact at the time crossing the Atlantic, in company with the late Lord Cunliffe, then Governor of the Bank of England, and certain military and naval officers. It was a mission in which the utmost circumspection was needed. German propagandists, disguised as Pacifists, were at work, and Mr Balfour had to lay emphasis on the fact that he had come to discuss practical details of a limited partnership, and not any grandiose scheme for an alliance. To his earliest interviewers, therefore, he returned soft answers of the kind which had so often turned away fiscal wrath and curiosity. He paid warm tribute to Mr Gerard and Mr Hoover; talked of 'the memorable doings of a benevolent neutrality,' and gave no countenance whatever to the little band of enthusiasts who wanted from him a message that should 'awaken America.' It was easy enough, as Mr Balfour knew, to 'awaken America'; the real point was whether when awakened she would get out of the right side of the bed. So Mr Balfour contrived to talk of everything but high politics. Arriving in Washington, he remarked that the weather reminded him of England at its best. 'On landing in America I was struck,' he added, 'by a somewhat unusual feeling which at the first moment I did not analyse, and suddenly it came upon me that this was the first time for two years and a half or more in which I had seen a properly lighted street.'

Mr Balfour was a little disconcerted with the American press. In England, of course, he has always resisted the interview. In the United States such an attitude was unthinkable. Mr Balfour, however, to some extent reconciled private feelings and public duty by treating the reporters as if they were a public meeting. 'He talked,' writes one who saw him, 'looking at a circular stained glass window in the rear and high above the gathering of newspaper men, seldom lowering his eyes to the level of the eyes in front of him. He fumbled uneasily with his coat and almost stammered—a little, more than a little, in awe of the greatness of the American institution that confronted him.'

In general he talked very little, listened a great deal, dressed fairly well, rode a bicycle, and occasionally made a pun with an American 'punch.' In a quiet way he made himself popular. He let it be known that, like President Wilson, he enjoyed detective stories, and that 'no treaty could increase British confidence in the United States.' In the right quarters he discussed supplies of food and munitions, leaving the question of a fighting force to Joffre and the French. The people of the Middle West were soon convinced that he was a 'sincere democrat,' a fact which, while it reflects no little credit on Mr Balfour the diplomat, does, perhaps, show how dangerous it is to judge a Briton from his words and conduct outside his own country.

At least one notable distinction fell to Mr Balfour during his American visit. He was the first 'Britisher' privileged to address Congress. With much tact, he opened his speech by a phrase that almost abolished distinctions of nationality, reminding his audience that he was himself a member of a free assembly like their own. When he spoke of the

war, it was its 'democratic' character that he emphasised; democracy was a word always on Mr Balfour's lips at this time, and he was quick to put his finger on the one indisputable argument regarding representative government as a guarantee against war. It is not that peoples are less ready to fight than kings, but that whole peoples cannot plot, and that ministers of self-governing states are seldom long enough in office to plot for them. 'A people and the representatives of a people,' he said, 'may be betrayed by some momentary gust of passion into a policy which they ultimately deplore, but it is only a military despotism of the German type that can through generations, if need be, pursue, steadily, remorselessly, unscrupulously, and appallingly, the object of dominating civilisation and mankind.'

Mr Balfour's address to Congress made an excellent impression, but his success in informal intercourse was even more remarkable. Going on the President's yacht to lay a wreath on the Washington tomb, he was discovered in the forecastle devoting his cigar-case and conversation to the sailors, and in a country given to picturesque journalism the incident, trivial as it was, assured his popularity. With the New York Chamber of Commerce he was able to hold an amiable discussion on the 'freedom of the seas,' and once he even ventured to rebuke those super-Americans who were belittling their country's efforts. Only as to post-war problems did he admit any misgivings, but for these he invented a formula which, if somewhat vague, was temporarily satisfactory. The 'political moderation' of the English-speaking races promised well, he said, for the restoration of civilisation. What subjects he discussed with American statesmen in conclave are unknown. They may have ranged from Ireland

to Mexico, but there is little doubt that beyond the Atlantic he was brought face to face with new ideas, which had at least a transient effect on his attitude to after-war problems.

During a short stay in Canada, the Foreign Secretary showed himself equally diplomatic. Bitter feeling then reigned between Quebec and the other provinces. It was a local edition of the Irish difficulty; the French Canadians, cherishing grievances on the language and education questions, were by no means whole-hearted in the prosecution of the war. The British Canadians, raising division upon division, were naturally incensed at Quebec's poor contribution, and regarded their discontent as factious and parochial. Mr Balfour, in addressing the Parliament at Ottawa, spoke first in French, to the gratification of the discontented minority. It was not much, but the most that could be done by a statesman who could hardly have intruded in a domestic quarrel. Mr Balfour, though quieter than most of our amateur diplomatists, was not the least successful of those who invaded foreign countries in the cause of propaganda; and the extreme modesty with which he regarded his efforts was perhaps misplaced. 'I felt,' he said, 'it was very easy to do harm, and very easy to do good.' Judging from the comments of the American press, he did no harm, and no inconsiderable good.

The performance, however, was not a showy one; and Mr Balfour on his return found demands for a reform of the Foreign Office no less insistent than had been those for an invigoration of the Admiralty. Lord Hardinge, the chief of the permanent staff, had been impugned (as Indian Viceroy) by the Mesopotamian Commissioners. Mr Balfour took the view that Mesopotamia had nothing to do with

the Foreign Office; Lord Hardinge might have committed errors as an Indian administrator, and yet be most successful in his new position. This reasoning was supported by a broad hint at resignation if the point were insisted on, and the victory remained with Mr Balfour. A little later, however, the attack was resumed from another direction, and this time with success. Lord Hardinge had written a letter, more candid than discreet, to Sir George Buchanan, our ambassador at Petrograd. In it he had alluded to the narrow-mindedness of a British ex-minister and the evasiveness of a foreign Premier. The letter was captured by a German submarine, and, of course, used to make mischief. Events took the course common in such circumstances; Lord Hardinge tendered his resignation; it was refused twice and accepted at the third time of asking. Mr Balfour himself offered to resign, but his colleagues of the Ministry would not let him go.

The autumn of 1917 saw a great revival of pacifism, heralded by the Pope's note to the Powers and emphasised by the Marquess of Lansdowne's famous letter. Lord Lansdowne was, of course, a valuable recruit. Hitherto, the pacifist had had no decorative asset beyond Mr Lees-Smith's corporal's stripe, and their unexpected capture of a Conservative statesman naturally made them clamorous. Early in November there was a full dress debate on 'peace by negotiation,' but the Foreign Secretary had no difficulty in routing his critics. Asked to define the war aims of the Allies, he instanced the independence of Poland and the rescue of Armenia. As to a conference—the air was not yet cleared of Stockholm—he dismissed it as useless; the mere drawing into a circle of persons who had no measure of agreement would be futile. That Mr Balfour was steering a middle course was

obvious. If he cared little for the Pacifists, who were active and zealous rather than numerous, he cared much for American opinion, and, in consequence, he became an object of suspicion in quarters in which vigour of language was deemed the only test of the strong man. Only a few days after he had dealt with Mr Ramsay Macdonald and the would-be negotiators, 'the present dispensation on the south side of Downing Street' was described as 'the nightmare that haunted every patriot.' Mr Balfour was unmoved. At a public welcome to M. Venizelos, he declared that we aimed neither at the destruction of the German Empire nor of German commerce, and at a luncheon to the American Ambassador, he defended the idea of the League of Nations against the 'cynical critic.' Mr Balfour got the worst of both worlds. On the one side he was represented as a dreamy innocent unfit to meet unscrupulous 'real-politicians' of the Central Empires; from the other side, the secret treaties, divulged through the Russian Revolution, were flung at him by the Pacifists. Mr Balfour met the double storm by an affectation of being more innocent than ever. He really could not see his way to having our foreign policy 'proclaimed to the sound of the trumpet at Charing Cross,' but, on the other hand, the aims of the Allies were known to be honourable, so why insist on highly technical details?

His elusiveness was well illustrated in the early months of 1918 by his references to Russia. Of the Bolshevik Government he did, indeed, speak plainly. 'Starvation, murder, and wholesale execution' were, he said, the methods by which it existed, but he left quite undefined British policy towards this criminal organisation. In January, he mentioned that Russia was still an Allied State

'so far as treaties could make her so.' The Petrograd administration was not recognised as either *de facto* or *de jure*, but 'unofficial relations' were to be opened through Litvinoff, a Jew who had married into a much respected Anglo-Jewish family. During the spring it seemed possible that the Japanese would, in quite a friendly way, invade Siberia, and that Britain would smile approval, but a little later Mr Balfour explained that the Government desired to secure Russia's restoration, politically and economically, 'without external influence and without infringement of territorial integrity.' Even his deference to America could not convert Mr Balfour to belief in open diplomacy. 'I have no secrets from President Wilson,' he said. 'Every thought I have of the war, or of the diplomacy connected with the war, is as open to him as to any other human being.' This was doubtless true, but it invited the retort that in the English statesman's mind were recesses to which neither the President nor any other mortal man had ever penetrated. The real Balfour doubtless appeared in his declaration made at about this time that it would be 'idiotic' to discuss in public controversial matters in which national sentiments or international interests were profoundly concerned.

The Austrian peace proposals made through Prince Sixte de Bourbon whilst Mr Balfour was in America furnished the Pacifists with good rhetorical ammunition. Mr Balfour's characteristic rejoinder was that he had 'very little time for dealing with history.' But though it was clear that the new Mr Balfour, with his faith in the League of Nations, bore a strong family resemblance to an earlier Mr Balfour, there was in his considered utterances a note very different from that animating some of his colleagues' speeches. He might be too old to absorb

the new ideas, but he was not one of those who had lived through the war and learned nothing. In August, 1918, he was heard regretting that 'this war had not yet produced a universal change of heart' and that it was not yet recognised that 'two great States ought no more to fight each other than a civilised man should knock his neighbour down when he happens to jostle him in the street.' If sometimes depressing, he was never coarsely cynical, and in every debate on foreign policy he did insist on something of the larger view.

Thus, in considering the Austrian proposals of September, 1918, while declaring 'victory—complete victory' to be 'absolutely essential,' he emphasised as the chief peace aim such an arrangement of the maps of Europe and the world that occasions for wars would not recur. 'Peace,' he said, 'was going to put a high strain on the moral and intellectual qualities of the peoples concerned,' and Germany looked for the old breach between America and Great Britain to be re-opened, but, he declared, 'there is such a thing as the English-speaking method of looking at the great affairs of mankind.' When negotiations really began, Mr Balfour would do nothing to satisfy the curiosity of Parliament; for secrecy as a virtue in itself he retained a reverence that Metternich could not have excelled; the mere notion of communications passing between the Allies being debated by the people who were shortly to be asked to vote on the question of peace-making seemed to him inexpressibly shocking.

On Sunday, October 27, after reading the first lesson at the morning service at St Margaret's, Westminster, Mr Balfour left for France in company with Mr Lloyd George. For some months afterwards he was much in Paris and at Versailles, but

the history of his part in the Peace Conference must remain unwritten. Perhaps there was no history; perhaps there was much. Only those who know can say. The surface facts are that in all the great matters Mr Lloyd George took not only the leading but the only rôle; while that part of the peace which concerned the League of Nations was made a side-show and left to Mr Balfour's kinsman and former subordinate, Lord Robert Cecil. Mr Balfour himself occasionally flits across the cinematograph film as a picturesque figure. He joined the best lawn tennis club in Paris, was frequently photographed in a soft hat, and displayed an amiable interest in Zionism in harmony with his famous declaration for a Jewish Palestine under British protection. Once he emerged in full official dignity; as chief British delegate he signed, in the Prime Minister's absence, the treaty with Austria at St Germain. When the German representatives spoke at Versailles he was observed to yawn. It was the action of a man certainly tired, perhaps bored, possibly disappointed.

'I am more or less happy,' Mr Balfour once said, 'when being praised; not very uncomfortable when being abused, but I have moments of uneasiness when being explained.' With such warning it would be inhuman to enter into surmise on this last phase of his statesmanlike activities, to theorise as to the advice he may have offered behind the scenes, or to speculate as to those parts of the Treaty which were his handiwork. It bears no internal evidence of that expanded intelligence, that large knowledge of European questions, that considerable grasp of political principle which, whatever his deficiencies as a social theorist, were certainly Mr Balfour's as a European statesman. During the war, though often reviled by the ignorant, Mr Balfour constantly

added to the kind of esteem which alone has value. As a peace plenipotentiary, his light was so successfully hidden that the delegates of Liberia and Siam were, by comparison, world figures. It was chiefly the enterprise of the photographers that reminded the British people that he was in Paris at all. Some months after the last scene at Versailles, Mr Balfour left the Foreign Office. Lord Curzon, whom he had encouraged and promoted as a young man, whom as Indian Viceroy he had supported in the difference with Lord Kitchener, and with whom, in spite of political differences, he had steadily maintained relations of cordial friendship, took his place. A few months after this change the Prime Minister happened to want to refer to Mr Balfour, and had some difficulty in remembering that he had accepted the position of Lord President of the Council! So passes the glory of the world of Westminster.

CHAPTER XXI

It was suggested in the opening chapter that Mr Balfour belongs to the class of public men whose powers of comprehension are quite disproportionately greater than their initiative or judgment: men who ordinarily think too quickly to act with energy and decision, and are often too intelligent to be quite wise. Lord Morley's comparison of Mr Balfour with Halifax the Trimmer, as portrayed by Macaulay, has already been noted. It may now be useful further to cite the historian on Halifax's defects as a man of public business:—

'That very fertility, that very acuteness, which gave a singular charm to his conversation, to his oratory, and to his writings, unfitted him for the work of promptly deciding practical questions. He was slow from very quickness. For he saw so many arguments for and against every possible course that he was longer in making up his mind than a dull man would have been. Instead of acquiescing in his first thoughts, he replied on himself, rejoined on himself, and surrejoined on himself. Those who heard him talk owned that he talked like an angel; but too often, when he had exhausted all that could be said, and came to act, the time for action had passed.'

It would be unjust to suggest that in Mr Balfour over-subtlety was carried to such extravagant lengths. There have been many occasions on which he has acted vigorously on first thoughts, and even, perhaps, some occasions on which he has acted first and

reflected afterwards. In some personal matters and, on occasion, in questions of foreign policy, not Richelieu himself could have dealt more in decision and less in self-question. But when we come to survey the whole field of Mr Balfour's activities it remains broadly true that his admirably keen intellect would have been more potent in performance had it been allied with greater energy and the capacity of deciding, once and for all, that one course is right, and all others wrong. One may borrow a metaphor from trade, and suggest that Mr Balfour's handicap was that of a grocer who attempts to weigh his cheese with the scales and weights of a chemist. Politics is a rough business, and the judgment needed for it is a rule-of-thumb judgment. Something closely approaching accuracy is necessary, but it is better to be a little out than too finicking; in the attempt to measure to a millimetre and weigh to a grain one is pretty certain to miss the essence of the calculation. Many times Mr Balfour has lost his market by debating too long whether it was the best time to sell: many times also he has been too indolent to instruct the auctioneer in time. It might almost be said that the most brilliant episodes of his political life have been due to accident. Something has happened—it happened during the Irish Secretaryship and also during the Tariff Reform controversy—to sting him into a kind of fever in which the sceptical intellect lost some of its power of veto on his passions, and allowed full assertion to the considerable latent store of nervous energy he really possesses. There are minds only at their best when wine removes the restraint of shyness or timidity. There are other natures which need the stimulus of danger to call forth their highest powers. Mr Balfour's seems to be such a nature. His early

sauntering tendency has remained the one constant factor of his character. In his recreations, as in his serious business, intense effort alternates with complete collapse. At tennis, the moment the necessity for fierce exertion was over, he would lie flat on his back, relaxed in every fibre. The late Bret Harte has described his method of carrying on a conversation in a country-house party: he exercised the utmost economy of exertion, never moving from the recumbent position he had taken up, and gazing in the intervals of talk 'in silent enjoyment or philosophical reverie' on the cloudless blue sky. In the same way between every round in the political fight he relapsed into lethargy. But when he had to bestir himself, he used all his complication of weapons with an energy quite marvellous to those who had only seen him bored and supine.

It is natural that the career of such a man should resemble less the masterpiece of a great novelist than a series of brilliant short stories strung together on a thread of personality. Mr Balfour's history contains passages of extraordinary vitality, but, like the romance of *Vivian Grey*, it constantly declines into the relatively commonplace. There is significance in the fact that, apart from foreign politics, the nearest approach to a consecutive story is found before 1902. Up to the retirement of Lord Salisbury it might be suggested, but it could not be definitely pronounced, that the extraordinary promise of Mr Balfour's early years would not be adequately fulfilled. A few months after Lord Salisbury's death, the discerning saw clearly that Mr Balfour's chief practical achievements as a domestic statesman lay behind him. It is within just surmise that the nephew lacked a quality which he could supply from without while his uncle lived, but that this quality was no

longer available after his uncle's death. The history of art supplies examples of pupils who were perhaps greater than their masters, but who only remained at their greatest while the master's influence was operative. Van Dyck occupied such a relation to Rubens. It may be suggested that Mr Balfour occupied a similar relation to Lord Salisbury. He surpassed his master in many ways. In sheer intellect he was fully the elder Cecil's equal; in subtlety, breadth, ingenuity, tact, delicacy of perception 'there could be no question with which of the two superiority lay. But Mr Balfour was lacking in some of the more robust and virile qualities in which Lord Salisbury abounded, and it doubtless counted much with him to have in the background that sturdy lump of manhood. At any rate, while Lord Salisbury was there, certain deficiencies were hardly noticeable; when Lord Salisbury was gone those deficiencies became at once of quite enormous importance. Before Lord Salisbury's retirement, the main impression of Mr Balfour was power, and his very affectations and peculiarities were understood to be the foibles of a strong man. After Lord Salisbury's death the main impression is dexterity. Over-simplification is always dangerous, and one must hasten to add that there were signs of some defect of backbone even in the strongest days of the Irish Secretaryship, just as there was ample evidence of strength of nerve and wrist to the very last moment of Mr Balfour's fighting career. But on the whole the popular impression is probably just. Apart from other temperamental peculiarities, Mr Balfour was not only a sceptic, but he was sceptical even of scepticism, and little less resentful of the confident denier than he was contemptuous of the fanatical believer. Excluding the case of Ireland, there was scarcely a domestic

political issue on which he could not see with equal clearness the arguments for and against. For a man to be a power of the first magnitude in politics, as in religion, it is not enough that he should possess a creed; the creed must possess him. Mr Balfour possessed much, but was possessed by nothing; and his one constant positive feeling was a cold dislike of enthusiasm. It might almost be said that he had often more in common with the sedater official chiefs of the opposite party than with the wilder spirits of his own.

The moral lack of strength inseparable from such leadership would have been minimised had Mr Balfour possessed the quality of binding to himself men of more positive and vivid personality. So exquisite a study in low tints would have gained by the neighbourhood of other good things in stronger colour. His premiership would no doubt have been as much a success as was his Irish Secretaryship (from its own point of view) had he been able to make himself heartily at one with Mr Chamberlain, who could give what he wanted, and wanted what he could give. But it was one of Mr Balfour's peculiarities that he could ill endure the comradeship of equals. Mr Chamberlain was an inheritance, and had to be taken over with the estate; but Mr Balfour took care, with regard to his own appointments, not to encourage men who could by any possibility threaten his position. He was compared, about the time of Mr Churchill's secession, to a beech tree: 'Very beautiful, but nothing could live under its shade.' As the older politicians, the Goschens and Hicks-Beaches, dropped out, he filled their places with those who, through character, mind, or circumstance, were likely to develop no inconvenient individuality. Whether it was his brother, or his kinsman, or his

friend whom he elevated, the understanding was the same; they were to be less Ministers of the Crown than retainers of Mr Balfour. With the possible exception of Mr Wyndham, Mr Balfour appointed nobody whose qualities were likely to compete with or supplement his own. He had talented subordinates like Mr Alfred Lyttleton, others much less talented, and still others with no discernible qualifications of any kind. But of all those whom he chose without pressure from Birmingham, hardly one stood out as a personage. A virile character, indeed, seemed to rouse in Mr Balfour a certain feeling of repugnance, and he specially disliked people with 'views' and 'principles.' He seems to have considered the one a species of folly, and the other (in ordinary men) a species of impertinence. His anger against the Free Fooders was really the expression of a contemptuous irritation that men of inferior position and understanding should presume to talk of conscience in a matter of pure expediency. It was the cold anger of a Roman magistrate against sectaries stupid enough to object to things so harmless as a libation or the invocation of a god.

The natural consequence was that those members of Mr Balfour's Ministry who entered it by way of Mr Chamberlain's headquarters were generally men of some strength of character, while his own personal following was singularly lacking in distinction. Mr Chamberlain was like a Plantagenet Earl at the head of his knights and men-at-arms; Mr Balfour rather resembled a Carolean squire leading his gamekeepers into battle. The history of the Tariff Reform controversy might have been very different had Mr Balfour commanded a number of talented men who were in essence more than retainers. But in fact he fought his fight for all practical purposes alone, and

had thus to adopt measures very different than those he could have employed with a formidable force under good subordinate generalship.

In such circumstances it is not surprising to find a considerable contrast between the earlier and later Balfour manners. During the Salisbury period Mr Balfour, though essentially Conservative, was relatively constructive. His Irish administration left much more than a negative mark on the history of Ireland. His Education Act, the most important since 1870, gave a new and valuable impetus, not yet exhausted, to public instruction in this country. At the same time it would be difficult to point to any marked change in Conservative thought between 1886 and 1903; there was a slight broadening as the result of the Liberal Unionist alliance, and that was all. But between 1903 and 1911, Conservatism was singularly barren in the matter of works and extraordinarily volatile in the matter of faith; it produced little but new rubrics; the party doctrines seemed to be—

'. . . intended
For nothing else but to be mended.'

It is scarcely possible to believe that, had Lord Salisbury lived to reach Mr Gladstone's age in Mr Gladstone's vigour, the Conservative party could have trodden during those eight years such strange places. Lord Salisbury knew, none better, the uses and the limitations of the House of Lords as a political weapon. He used it remorselessly on occasion; but in the face of a firm national demand the sword was lifted gracefully in salute; it was never brandished in ineffectual menace. 'It is no courage,' he said, as long ago as 1868, 'it is no dignity to withstand

the real opinion of the nation'; and his will would have prevailed, in any party council in which he took part, against the 'double or quits' gambling in which Mr Balfour, however reluctantly, acquiesced. It may further be noticed that during the earlier period Mr Balfour, though always given to subtleties, harnessed his matchless dialectical ingenuity to real business carts, meant to carry real calves to and from market. In the latter time he drove his blood sophisms, so to speak, in a trotting sulky, almost as if he had come to believe that the skilful construction of dilemmas for an adversary were an end in itself. There is a different quality in the speeches made between 1886 and 1903, and those made between 1903 and 1911, and again a different quality between these latter and those of the war period. In the Spring, as in the Indian summer, of Mr Balfour's career we find a moral force which was lacking in the most brilliant performances of the middle manner. In the first period we feel a real man who at least believes in Conservatism; in the last we feel a real man who at least believes in British victory. In the middle period we are simply conscious of an extremely dexterous politician already in Botheration Mansions and trying to keep clear of Queer Street. There is the impression of a supremely clever advocate who, because he dare not call witnesses, has to exhaust every resource of his mind and learning in framing objections to the indictment.

Not that Mr Balfour was fighting for nothing. As to the essential points, first of gaining time for the new European policy with the execution of which he was charged, and secondly of saving his party from the fate which overtook Liberalism in 1886, he was intensely and even desperately in earnest. But the end alone mattered; the means signified

only so far as they were effective, and they were the means most naturally employed by a man highly courageous and (in his own way) excessively obstinate, but one whose courage and obstinacy savoured rather of the mediæval Florentine than of the modern Englishman. Infinitely supple in detail, no man could be more patiently firm with regard to the main matter; and he had that rare kind of bravery which is even content, if anything is to be gained by it, to incur the reproach of its absence. Few of Mr Balfour's virtues or defects are, in fact, English; he has neither the English heartiness nor the English cloudiness of thought; and his political course to the discerning was a standing reminder that Edinburgh is morally and spiritually nearer the Continent than London. When Scotland had politics of its own, they were not managed by 'tremendous cheers,' and Mr Balfour's greatest feats as a politician have not been on the platform or in the House of Commons.

Nevertheless he always did his duty in these ways. It is quite a mistake to regard him as a slack Party leader; like most indolent men who are forced to it, he got through a vast deal of work. He often addressed public meetings at the rate of one a fortnight, and few leaders have been more constant in their Parliamentary attendance. Mr Balfour seldom missed an important debate, and he assumed, as none of his predecessors in the leadership did, responsibility for the preparation and passage of important measures. Further, he attended with exemplary minuteness to the details of party management, and he was always deeply interested in the deliberations of the Committee of Imperial Defence, the formation of which was perhaps the greatest of his administrative reforms. Foreign affairs have ever interested him, and his mind has a natural

aptitude for questions of strategy; he would, one suspects, have been really at home in the politics of the sixteenth century. All these varied duties, added to the immense anxieties arising from party differences, made his task a heavy one during his Premiership. It would have been eased by devolution, but Mr Balfour no more favoured that policy in his own affairs than in regard to Ireland. His jealousy of any power near the throne might condemn him for months together to answer daily not far short of a hundred letters—many on the most insignificant subjects—and to keep him busy till all sorts of hours at night. But every letter went out signed by himself, though in the handwriting of a secretary (the typewriter was not in favour in the Downing Street of those days), and a collection of these missives would laughably illustrate the mixture of small things with great in modern politics. To call indolent a man charged with these enormous labours may well seem fantastic, and Mr Balfour could always confound, by the mere indication of his activities, those critics who complained of 'lassitude' in the conduct of party affairs. But there was still something in the indictment. So long as his interest was wholly engaged, or his self-love implicated, Mr Balfour's power of work was prodigious. But he had long intervals of inaction and lack of interest; he could never acquire that unhasting, unresting, methodical habit of business which enabled many men of smaller qualities, giving themselves far less strain, to maintain for many years complete mastery of the machines of party and of government. Mr Balfour has always given a slight suggestion of the brilliant amateur, and in nothing more than in the amateur's vice of overdoing both work and holiday.

CHAPTER XXII

No. 4 Carlton Gardens represents, perhaps more closely than Whittinghame, the personal tastes of Mr Balfour; there still remain the fine Burne-Jones paintings which proclaim his taste in modern art. But in either place the visitor would be favoured with ample evidences of the perfect sincerity of that aloofness which has always distinguished this eminent man. Mr Balfour has a wide range of interests, and is in some ways extremely modern. He was, for example, among the first to take up cycling on the removal of the social ban which condemned users of the early bicycle as 'cads on castors.' Old members recall how he came down to the House of Commons one day in the nineties with one arm in a sling and one foot in a slipper, the result of a collision with a carriage. With equally fresh enthusiasm he threw himself into motoring when it was only a craze, and he remained an enthusiast after it had reached the dignity of a social necessity. There are numerous stories of his exceeding the speed limit; on one such occasion he had with him the Recorder of a midland city. The accusing constable, imputing excessive celerity, was met by courteous argument. 'Look at your indicator,' he said, 'and you'll see that I'm right.' 'I'm sorry,' replied Mr Balfour apologetically, 'I haven't an indicator, but' (with emphasis) 'I've got a Recorder.' Fearing some hideous contrivance which would bring him to confusion in the witness-box, the constable apologised and withdrew, and Mr Balfour went on his journey with a rejoicing chuckle. As a golfer, Mr Balfour's repute is great;

he may almost be said to have invented golf as an English pastime, though he only took to the game, appropriately enough, when he was appointed Scottish Secretary in 1886. 'Golf,' he has said, 'has all the thrilling excitement of deer-stalking without its inconveniences and dangers.' At tennis he is excellent, with a peculiar style and 'a service and return extremely difficult to take owing to the spin which he gives to the ball'—needless to say 'most misleading to his opponents.' In earlier days he was an excellent shot, and a tireless deer-stalker. At school he played a certain amount of football.

In this addiction to outdoor sports (encouraged, no doubt, by his great horror, that of getting fat) Mr Balfour is fully in touch with the times; so, too, in his eager interest in the progress of science and the most modern tendencies of speculation. Nor is he in any sense remote from what is going on in society. His own circle is rather narrow, but he is amused and interested by the 'daintier kind of gossip,' and his ignorance of what appears in the newspapers is merely a jest. It is true that he is curiously unaware of many things, including some which a Minister of experience might be supposed to know; some of his ideas on Imperial geography are piquant in so distinguished an Imperialist. But on most matters of the day, not only political, but social and personal, he is quite remarkably informed; he is by no means averse from young society, and the late Mr Alfred Lyttleton described him as 'deeply interested in the human comedy.'

But for all this there is a good deal that is old-fashioned in the houses where Mr Balfour is host and Miss Balfour the charming hostess. To put it more accurately, perhaps, they suggest an imperfect sympathy with the present. Mr Balfour's great

collection of Handel's works—it is one of the finest in the world—is in a sense a reproach to Strauss and Debussy; fondness for any other master might sound no note of challenge, but Handel! Mr Balfour is not only an impenitent but an aggressive enthusiast. Handel, he says, was the 'greatest master of choral effect the world has ever seen,' and he has remarked on the singularity of the fact that the age of Voltaire produced the most profoundly religious music we have.

In literary matters Mr Balfour tends equally to the eighteenth century. He loves the ease and polish, the calm rationalism, the sword-and-periwig mixture of virility and polish that distinguished the great writers of that age. His interest in nineteenth century literature diminishes from about the time of the Reform Act. For him the Victorians are on the whole an inferior race; if they are giants at all, then they are giants with a limp; moreover, Mr Balfour would probably think, what is the good of being a giant? He finds a thin lucidity in Mill and a windiness in Carlyle; he has a considerable contempt for the 'Corn Law squabbles' and all the literature arising therefrom; and neither Browning nor Newman impresses him. He prefers Miss Austen to either Thackeray or Dickens, and Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley to any modern poet. It is rather curiously significant that Mr Balfour in his 'backwardation' stops short at the eighteenth century. The seventeenth rather repels his essentially tolerant spirit; the seventeenth century was an age of cranks and faddists, and with fads and cranks of any kind Mr Balfour has small sympathy. Though a member of the Scottish Church, he has no pleasure in Puritanism, and not much interest in Puritans. Cromwell he described as a great soldier, but 'on

the whole ineffectual, and certainly the most pathetic figure in history.' Nor do the great Elizabethans seem to attract any large share of his devotion. As for the classics, he has little of Mr Gladstone's enthusiasm for the Greek and Latin poets. 'What at first was the delight of nations,' Mr Balfour once said, 'declines by slow but inevitable gradation into the luxury, or the business, or even the vanity of the few. What was once read for pleasure is now read for curiosity.' One gathers that he at least would never turn in a spare half hour to Homer or Virgil, or even to Horace or Catullus.

The modernist, however, will get from him as little satisfaction as the enthusiast for antiquity. Perhaps no living man at all approaching him in celebrity has said less in commendation of people now writing. He has a fellow-philosopher's fondness for Bergson, but of the purely literary men of this generation we can only presume ignorance, or disapproval, or mere toleration. Mr H. G. Wells amused him with his scientific romances, but was dropped when he began to preach: Mr Chesterton is enjoyed as an epigrammatist; but Mr Arnold Bennett and Mr Conrad seem hardly to exist for Mr Balfour, and even the meteoric splendour of Mr Kipling appears to have made little impression. Of Mr Bernard Shaw as a dramatist Mr Balfour has a due appreciation; that keen irony and wicked wit could hardly fail to appeal to one side of him; it is said that he went no fewer than five times to the first production of *John Bull's Other Island*, inviting first Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, and then Mr Asquith. But there is no indication that he looks on Mr Shaw as more than an amusing journalist who spins out a leading article to the length of a play and contrives to make it interesting throughout.

Mr Balfour's attitude to contemporary literature is, in short, tolerant and no more. 'I have no sympathy,' he said in a Rectorial address at St Andrews, 'with the horror over the incessant accumulation of books. They need hurt no one who possesses the very moderate degree of social courage required to make the admission that he has not read the last new novel or the current number of a fashionable magazine. . . . It is certainly remarkable that any person who has nothing to get by it should destroy his eyesight and confuse his brain by a conscientious attempt to master the dull and doubtful details of the European diary daily transmitted by "our special correspondent."' The fallacy that 'a little learning is a dangerous thing' once roused Mr Balfour, himself an amateur of the desultory, to a spirited protest. 'He has only half learned the art of reading,' he said, 'who has not added to it the even more refined accomplishments of skipping and skimming.' On another occasion he speaks of 'the advantage of an omnivorous, universal, and insatiable curiosity to know everything that can be known. . . . It is a pleasure that lasts longer than any other. It is an appetite not followed by satiety, which is independent of changes and circumstances, or of the love or dislike of your fellow-men.'

We have here, no doubt, the clue to Mr Balfour's real enthusiasm. Like Bacon, he takes all knowledge as his province. Art he regards, on the whole, simply as a solace, much on the same plane as a cigar or a liqueur—at the best as an embrocation to ease the rheumatism of the soul. The bent of his mind is, in the widest sense, scientific. 'Newton,' he says, 'was perhaps the greatest man the world has ever seen.' The eulogy is significant. Such a selection is only possible to one who places far above every other

human activity the accumulation and systematisation of knowledge. 'I would rather be known,' he once said, 'as having added something to our knowledge of truth and nature than for anything else I could imagine.' In this enthusiasm for science he, no doubt, seriously underrates the importance of the prophet, the poet, the man of letters, the artist in various kinds, those who guide and those who bring sweetness to life. 'If in the last hundred years,' he once said, 'the whole material setting of civilisation has altered, we owe it neither to politicians nor to political institutions. We owe it to the continued efforts of those who have advanced science and those who have applied it. If our outlook upon the universe has suffered modifications in detail so great and so numerous that they amount collectively to a revolution, it is to men of science we owe it, not to theologians or philosophers. On these, indeed, weighty responsibilities are being cast. They have to harmonise and to co-ordinate, to preserve the valuable essence of what is old. But science is the great instrument of social change, all the greater because its object is not change but knowledge, and its silent appropriation of this dominant function, amid the din of political and religious strife, is the most vital of the revolutions which have marked the development of modern civilisation.'

It would be interesting to know whether the eloquent author of this eulogy would now repeat it without modification. Its fallacy, discernible at any time, has been emphasised by recent events. But it would have been possible even a dozen years ago to point out that nearly all the progress of science was ultimately traceable to the very political institutions, the very theologians and philosophers, whom Mr Balfour belittled. The nineteenth century saw

no great march of scientific innovation in Mohammedan or Buddhist Asia, and the contribution of the Southern European States was small. A great part of the Germanies, to their credit, had proved that much freedom and vigour of speculation could co-exist with a highly defective political system, and in fact the loosely-knit but fairly free Germany of the first half of the nineteenth century was, on the whole, more distinguished for originality of scientific thought than the later and more constrictive Empire. But, apart from Germany, what are the facts? Great Britain, France, and the United States of America between them supplied all that vast effort which produced the world-wide social change of which Mr Balfour speaks; and these three nations were for the greater part of the century the only nations at once powerful and free both politically and intellectually. The great scientific progress of Italy dates from the exclusion of a foreign tyranny and the establishment of something which, whatever its defects, was tolerable in comparison with what had gone before. The scientific progress of Spain, less remarkable but still noteworthy, corresponds with the gradual liberalisation, if not of Spanish political institutions, at any rate of the spirit of Spanish administration. The scientific progress of Japan is a still more remarkable example of the connection between progress and political institutions; it was the direct result of a political revolution, provoked by contact with the three leading nations of the West. In short, there is the closest possible relation between the march of science and the reasonable efficiency and freedom of political institutions; where there was liberty, greater or less, there was progress, greater or less; where there was want of liberty, there was in almost exact correspondence stagnation. But

whence spring 'political institutions'? They do not grow spontaneously from the soil; they are not, as Mr Balfour almost seems to suggest, an affair of carpentery. Political institutions, so far as they are real, are an emanation of the human soul; they are the offspring of conscious thought or sub-conscious feeling, and both thought and feeling ultimately derive from the despised 'theologians and philosophers.' The theologians (using the word in a wider sense than customary) may be placed, as Mr Balfour places them, first; for the philosophers, though often denying with oaths and curses the source of their inspiration, are really as fully saturated with the Christian ethic as the poets and novelists who clamour for a sort of atheistic theocracy in which, for the first time, we should see Christianity in perfect operation. Thus a Japanese statesman, who thinks of the Trinity as one with Shaka Muni, will quite unconsciously reinforce an argument by reflections in the very spirit, if not of Nazareth, at any rate of the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

Surely the truth is, not (as Mr Balfour infers) that 'politicians and political institutions,' 'theologians and philosophers,' are comparatively unimportant, but that they are quite stupendously important, and that the whole present trouble of the world is that the theologians have been too timid, the philosophers too dull, the politicians too dishonest or incapable, and the political institutions too inelastic. With half the progress in science, and twice the progress in political and ethical development, the world (or at least the world of the white man) would be to-day absolutely happy, and well on the road to far greater happiness. It is surely a grim satire on Mr Balfour's eulogy of science, and disparagement of politics, that most intelligent people in every part

of the civilised world are puzzling how best to escape, by political means, from the horrors with which an unfettered science threatens to overwhelm the race in the next war.

These words, spoken by a politician concerning his own trade and his fellow-tradesmen, vividly illustrate Mr Balfour's view, during at least the greater part of his life, of the destinies of his race. Assuredly Mr Balfour is neither inhumane nor insensitive. He is as free from the rigidly class spirit as any of the men of the eighteenth century whom he admires. Let a man have the manners, the accomplishments, and the habits of mind of a gentleman, and he will not inquire, any more than the great Whig nobles did, as to his bank balance or his family tree. But, unless his American experiences wrought any considerable change, he has always taken the essentially aristocratic view of society. There is a certain amount of culture and comfort to go round; to enlarge the circle of sharers, without enlarging what is to be shared, will do a certain positive harm, and can do no appreciable good. Try to irrigate the desert with the springs of the oasis, and you shall not make the desert blossom, but you shall lose the one island of verdure and plenty. Attempt to get too many on a raft, and you shall condemn all to drown. To Mr Balfour the mass of mankind is necessarily doomed to hard, unthankful, unremitting toil; it was so in every past age, it must be so, more or less, in every age to come. He thinks in much the same terms that a kindly Pagan slave-holder thought two thousand years ago, as a kindly Virginian planter thought eighty years ago. What has been shall be, and there is nothing new, morally, under the sun. But this modern magic of science—this is new; this is something the old pessimist of

Ecclesiastes could not possibly foresee; it is even, in a sense, hopeful; the dwellers in the oases may be appreciably increased, and the 'congested' desert may be relieved by emigration to other oases once afar off, but now brought nearer by space-annihilating inventions. Hence the 'din of political and religious strife' (to which, so incongruously, we have to add our own cultured voice) is really of very small importance—an 'organised quarrel' over trifles, compared with which the watching of a retort or the measurement of an electric current is of real moment.

That Mr Balfour, with his considerable intellect, should have taken such a view of the business to which he devoted the best years of a long and active life might be called astonishing were astonishment on such a subject permissible. Astonishment is so little permissible that the first instinct is to thank him for at least not being a gratuitous humbug, and for refraining to talk 'shop' in ordinary society. An architect who talked of the comparative futility of design in building, a butcher who enlarged on the unsatisfying qualities of chops, a dentist who declared that listening to a Christian Science sermon was a more efficacious remedy for toothache than the most skilful stopping—all these would occasion mild surprise. We even lift our eyebrows when a Dean of the Church of England grows enthusiastic over the perfections of the Buddhist philosophy and ethic. But a very great politician, and even statesman, may speak cheerfully of the 'organised quarrel' and of the comparative unimportance of politicians and political institutions, and his audience merely smiles at his frankness. 'Science, not politics, dominates and directs the world in an era more fruitful of change than any of which we have record,' says Mr Balfour. He never seems to have anticipated the retort, 'Why,

then, being a free man who could choose your career, came you to be a politician ? '

The truth, of course, is that in all indifferent matters Mr Balfour thinks with freedom and sincerity; in politics, while free from the faintest suspicion of unworthy motive or personal self-seeking, he adopts the habitual cynicism of all players in that fascinating game of mixed chance and skill of which he has been so accomplished a player. He lauds science at the expense of politics because he does not recognise politics as a science or as an art, though he enjoys it as a game, and has a deep respect for most of the rules which should govern players. One side, of course, he has always treated quite seriously. All questions of foreign policy, all questions affecting the defence of the country, he has placed in a category apart. On Ireland and education, also, his attitude, though modified often by prejudice and sometimes by opportunism, was that of serious and responsible statesmanship. But with regard to the greater part of the affairs coming within his province as a Unionist and a party leader, his first aim was to let the sleeping dogs lie, his second to secure that, if they must wake, they should bite the other side.

To a French critic he at first appeared ' a living problem, a personality of irreconcilable elements all compact—a Tory preaching democracy, a sceptic with a mania for theology, a politician profoundly disgusted with politics. . . . If he were sincere, what a riddle! And if he were not, what a comedy! ' But, as Mr Augustin Filou proceeded with his analysis, it appeared to him that Mr Balfour was ' perfectly sincere—more sincere than the greater part of the statesmen that I have had the good or bad fortune to encounter.'

' What a riddle! ' is, indeed, the ultimate comment

on this strange and elusive personality, at once so familiar and so remote. It is the nature of riddles that there should be a perfect answer to them, if one had the wit to find it. The perfect answer to this riddle may be found when all the diaries of to-day are published to the world. But it has still to be sought, and Mr Balfour himself, with his infinite capacity for laying false scents, only confuses the pursuit.

CHAPTER XXIII

Enthusiastic Liberal politicians are understood to have occasionally regretted in private those animated but disastrous excursions of Mr Gladstone into the stricken field of religious polemics which they dutifully applauded in public. It is probable that enthusiastic Tories have occasionally regretted Mr Balfour's mysterious excursions into metaphysics. But there is a more than superficial difference between these amateur employments of two great statesmen. Nobody outside politics ever believed for a moment that Mr Gladstone might possibly have left a greater reputation behind him had he eschewed the service of the State for the meditation of the study. Some few admirers of Mr Balfour may reasonably wonder whether his name would not have bulked larger in the long run if he had deserted politics for philosophy.

Five hundred years hence it will probably not matter very much in history that the accident of a Unionist victory in 1895 established Mr Balfour in Downing Street for a full decade. But the Lecky of that time may perhaps add a footnote to his colossal work deploring that a thinker potentially of the front rank should have devoted to the transient Tariff Reform controversy those rare qualities of subtle analysis which might have added a permanent contribution to the most recondite problems of theology.

As things are, Mr Balfour's two philosophical works remind one rather of the outer and inner door to a great house than of the house itself. Both doors are of dignified design and ample proportions. They

are lavishly decorated by an artist whose work is always in perfect taste. But the purpose of doors is to conduct into interiors, and after admiring the doors in detail, we are a little surprised to find that the interior does not exist. And when one has sufficiently discussed the beauty of the panels, it is disconcerting to feel the open air still blowing about one's ears.

Mr Balfour's first work, *A Defence of Philosophic Doubt*, probably finds few readers to-day. Nor is the reason far to seek. It is not really necessary to defend the majority. In the Middle Ages the title of the book alone would have placed it on the Index, and its author in the dungeon. But in our time the scientist doubts the revealed philosophy of religion; the religious doubt the deduced philosophy of science; doubt is universal, and the propriety of what is universal is not really in doubt. He who defends the custom of living in houses as beneficial to humanity may draw crowded and excited audiences in Tierra del Fuego, but he will hardly rank as a prophet in Middlesex.

The second and more important work, *The Foundations of Belief*, is avowedly constructive; and, despite the wrath of Huxley, who devoted the last weeks of his life to attacking it, the book is of considerable importance and may prove of permanent interest.

Its general argument is easy to follow. Citing, but not accepting, the materialist argument that this world is the only world we know, or can know, Mr Balfour shows from the recognised limitations of our senses that even the knowledge we possess of this world must be fragmentary and imperfect. All this, of course, is the small change of current controversy, and the same may be said of an analysis of the Spencerian system of morals and æsthetics that follows.

So far the author has merely outlined his general antagonism to the Rationalist, or as he prefers to call it, the Naturalist school; but it is to be noted that his repugnance to the rationalist method is so strong that he discounts rather heavily even the school of Christian rationalism that flourished in eighteenth century England.

What, then, are we to put in the place of Rationalism, which is to be deposed not so much because it gives wrong as because it gives inadequate answers? Since we all seek certainty, Mr Balfour's answer is clear: 'Certitude is found to be the child, not of Reason, but of Custom.' We cannot all investigate everything with our reason; there is not time. Moreover, there never has been time. 'If we consider what must have happened at that critical moment in the history of organic development when first conscious judgments of sense-perception made themselves felt as important links in the chain connecting nervous irritability with muscular action, is it not plain that any individual in whom such judgments were habitually qualified and enfeebled by even the most legitimate scepticism would incontinently perish, and that those only would survive who possessed, and could presumably transmit to their descendants, a stubborn assurance which was beyond the power of reasoning either to fortify or undermine?'

The Certitude that is founded on Custom is therefore our guide, and its proper name is Authority. On his defence of Authority, as a thing apart altogether from Reason, Mr Balfour has lavished all the resources of his dialectical skill and subtlety; it is a finished study that he gives us here, and not, like the rest of the book, a series of introductory notes. It is easy to attack it, and no doubt it has been attacked, as Tory metaphysics. But the trouble is that Nature is

herself a desperate Tory; she works by evolution, not revolution; her innovations are few, her imitations innumerable. We may be the creatures of circumstance, but far more are we the creatures that our ancestors have made us; their authority controls all but a small fraction of our physical acts and our mental processes. It is only the fraction that is free, and even that fraction is free only during part, and that not generally the greater part, of the normal life.

So far we are on firm ground, but the firmness of the ground has often been overlooked in the recurrent controversies of the last three centuries between Authority and Reason in politics and religion. It is in his insistence on the too often forgotten fact that Authority has a legitimate, and perhaps a major place, in life that the true value of Mr Balfour's philosophical work resides. Authority derived from ancestral custom is the real basis of the bulk of our actions and of nearly all our current beliefs, which most of us have neither time nor perhaps inclination to investigate; why, then, he asks in effect, should the ancestral authority that we accept without question in other respects be spurned or rejected in religion?

The dilemma appears momentarily awkward; it is, as Huxley said of the book as a whole, a good debating point. The answer is worked out with some dialectical skill, but it fails to convince, for a simple reason. The foundation of belief is admittedly authority. But authority has no necessary connection with truth; there is abundant authority for the belief in witchcraft and for the hypothesis that the sun moves round the earth. And when the authority changes, what is then the foundation of belief if not the new authority? Now this is precisely what has happened in philosophy. The old authority taught that man was the centre of the universe, and his destiny

the final purpose for which God had constructed it. Mr Balfour has himself stated the standpoint of the new authority in words so eloquent that they may serve as an example of a literary style which, at its best, is hardly surpassed in our language:—

'The very existence of Man is an accident, his story a brief and transitory episode in the life of one of the meanest of the planets. Of the combination of causes which first converted a dead organic compound into the living progenitors of humanity, science, indeed, as yet knows nothing. It is enough that from such beings famine, disease, and mutual slaughter, fit nurses of the future lords of creation, have gradually evolved, after infinite travail, a race with conscience enough to feel that it is vile, and intelligence enough to know that it is insignificant. We survey the past, and see that its history is of blood and tears, of helpless blundering, of wild revolt, of stupid acquiescence, of empty aspirations. We sound the future, and learn that after a period, long compared with the individual life, but short indeed compared with the divisions of time open to our investigation, the energies of our system will decay, the glory of the sun will be dimmed, and the earth, tideless and inert, will no longer tolerate the race which has for a moment disturbed its solitude. Man will go down to the pit, and all his thoughts will perish. The uneasy consciousness, which in this obscure corner has for a brief space broken the contented silence of the universe, will be at rest. Matter will know itself no longer. Imperishable monuments, and immortal deeds, death itself, and love stronger than death, will be as though they had never been. Nor will anything that is be better or be worse for all that the labour, genius, devotion,

and suffering of man have striven through countless generations to affect.'

That is the new authority of philosophy. If it is not the foundation of belief, it is at least the foundation of such belief as many have. It may not be true. But Mr Balfour does not formally deny its truth; he only denies that it is the full truth, and he hopes that somewhere, remote from, or perhaps invisibly adherent to, these painful futilities whose unreal glory has departed with the sunken sun of revelation, there may be an ideal universe in which our spiritual desires may be fulfilled. So do we all hope; but we have no certain knowledge of these things. And if we accept his central position in this as in other matters, that 'Certitude is the child of Custom, not of Reason,' then is our position still no better. For Custom has given us the certitude only of this material world, and in the flesh we know no other, nor can we know another save by hope or revelation.

It is here that Mr Balfour has not worked out his theme. He has indeed made clear the foundations of belief. But foundations are made for houses to be built upon. And the architect who might have done so much turned to other work.

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